The Event in Postwar Fiction

Matthew Wilkens

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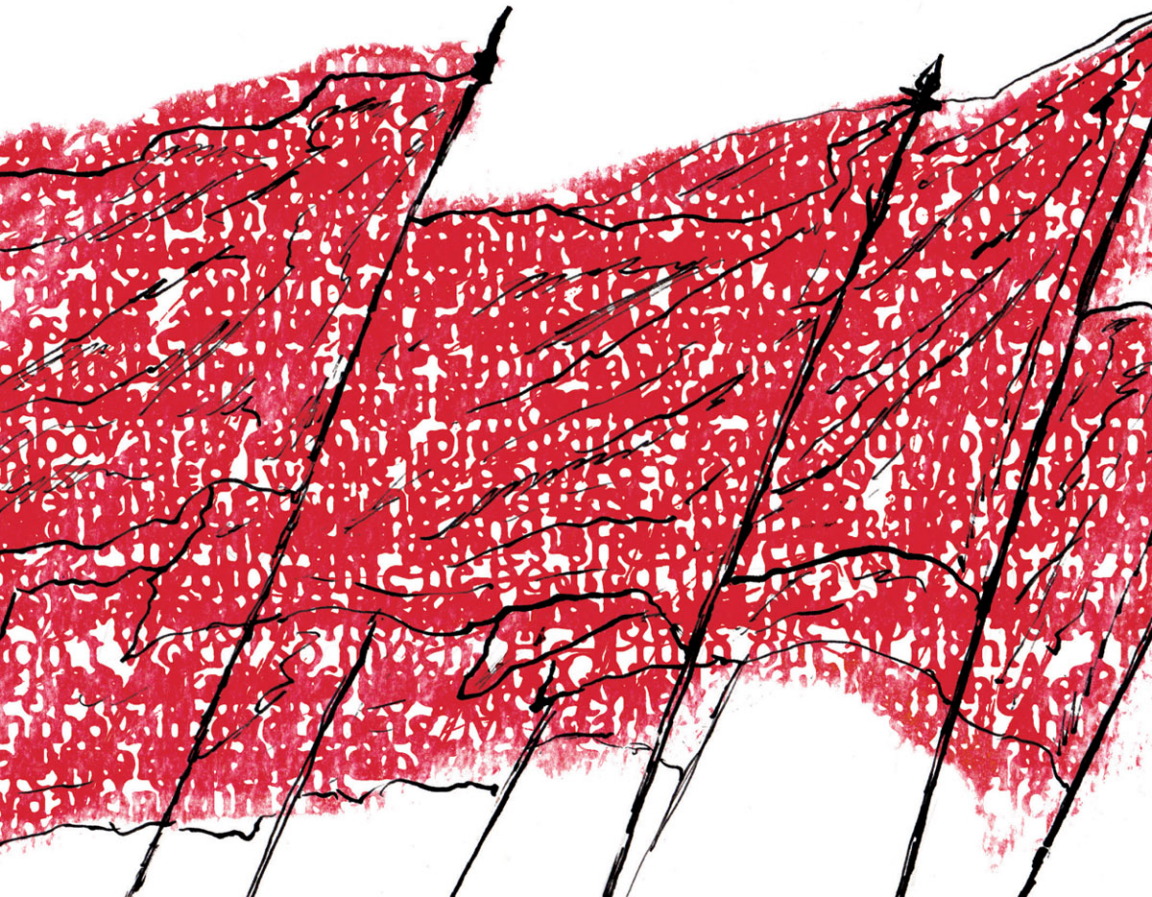

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Revolution

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The Event in Postwar Fiction

Matthew Wilkens

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For Elizabeth

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Revolution

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1

The Fifties on Their Own

The nineteen fifties are stranger than you'd think. Stranger than they get credit for, anyway. Socially, politically, and artistically, those years make up an odd interregnum between the first half of the twentieth century—still tied in very real ways to the problems and orders of the Victorian era and the Gilded Age—and the pervasive transformations of the later sixties that mark the beginning of our contemporary world. The differences are those between Jim Crow and the civil rights movement, socialist parties and the Red Scare, world wars and small wars, manufacturing and financialization, empire and postcoloniality, modernism and postmodernity. These are big, important changes. The fifties don't line up very well on either side of them.

This lack of alignment has pushed our understanding of the immediate post–World War II period in two directions, neither of them very useful. On one hand, it has often been easy, especially in literary studies, to ignore the years between, say, 1948 and 1962 more or less completely, on the ground that nothing much happened at the time. There were the Beats, sure, and existentialism, but neither one carried much forward momentum and neither seems especially contemporary—or like the progenitor of our own moment—today. On the other hand, we've often found in the fifties merely an amalgam of prehistories and aftereffects of the much more durable orders between which they reside. But these are mistakes. The fifties were not only their own thing, but getting to the bottom of the *way* in which they were their own thing can tell us a lot about how the kinds of breaks in historical consciousness that they represent take place.

What do I mean by that? The idea is that the fifties and their cultural products look the way they do because they responded to the collapse of an older order—namely, the systems of industrial capital, durable social hierarchy, restricted democracy, modernist experimentalism, and the like—before any adequate new arrangement had emerged to take its place. The resulting lack of fit between older and newer forms implies that across any number of domains, what we'd expect to see in such moments of upheaval is a proliferation of (mostly failed) attempts to feel the way toward new social, political, and aesthetic systems that would work more fruitfully in the new situation.

If this view of systemic instability is right, it goes a long way toward explaining our contemporary reaction to the fifties. Most of what was produced at the time ultimately didn't work and so can be safely ignored, from a later point of view, as part of the era's array of failed forms. The few things that did work—racial and gender identity as sites of political action, say, or pastiche as a central narrative mode—then become parts of a longer story about the development of contemporary forms. And so there's no transitional moment or mode as such, just failure and prehistory.

To eliminate transition as a mode in its own right, however, is an error. It neglects in equal measure most of the features and products of the time, the mechanics by which a few of those became the foundations of our own era, and the ways in which we might understand the move from prewar to postwar as anything other than a set of one-off changes in response to unique conditions. By disregarding the transitional mode as such, we miss the possibility that there are important continuities not only across historically adjacent eras but also among the well-separated moments of revolutionary change between them. The last point is the more important. Whatever happened after World War II and however valuable it may be to understand the changes, literary and otherwise, introduced during those years, the time itself is past. We know how it turned out; the results are all around us. Or at least it seemed that way until recently. But today, as we find it increasingly difficult to reconcile the social and aesthetic norms born of the sixties—gathered, subject to the usual caveats, under the heading of the postmodern—with the conditions of our contemporary existence, we might ask ourselves whether we can learn anything from the fifties, the last time we found ourselves in a moment of such confusion.

The attempt to see the immediate postwar years as symptomatic of how

large-scale, discontinuous cultural changes take place leads in three directions, only two of which have to do with the fifties proper. First, we need to know something about how revolutionary events in the abstract are expected to work. A full elaboration will have to wait for chapter 3, but the compressed version finds that events involve a change in the classes of objects and the relations between those objects that are recognizable within a given cultural context. This shift arises not from anything already directly discernible within that context but from the assertion, initially underjustified and not even fully speakable, that things are other than they appear.

In the literary contexts that are the primary focus here, this general claim translates into linked attempts both to change the subject matter of fiction and to develop systems of representation adequate to those new subjects. To characterize these changes is the second major direction of the investigation. For postwar fiction, the attempts to refashion both content and representational form account for what are otherwise two especially baffling features of many of the books written during the period, namely, their heavy reliance on allegory and their tendency toward rawly accumulative encyclopedism. Novels ranging from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* to William Gaddis's *The Recognitions* to Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, as well as major texts by Jack Kerouac, Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, William Golding, and others—all published from the late forties through the early sixties—can, in fact, often be read as encyclopedic allegories of the process of revolutionary change itself, at least as it exists within the realm of literature, making them especially useful as vehicles through which to examine the broad features of that process.

Finally, there's the matter of how the specific cultural and aesthetic dislocations of the fifties are exercised in its fiction. Much of this work has to do with the shortcomings of modernist narrative when confronted with shifting postwar economic and social orders. But it also encompasses the ways in which books of the period project—but cannot really articulate—a new subjective experience. This is important less because these (very) late modernist texts "missed" the experience of postmodernity (although they did) than because *subject formation* itself is the difficult key term linking revolutionary events to transformed historical situations. By understanding how postwar fiction struggled with its subjects, we can see not only how potentially revolutionary events take hold but also how they fail—as they most often do.

What Ended during the Fifties?

Quite a few specific things came to punctual ends during the fifties: legal school segregation in the United States, Joseph McCarthy's senate career, the Korean War (practically speaking), the Marshall Plan, European colonial rule in the first handful of African states, French sovereignty in Indochina, the Batista regime in Cuba, the lives of Jackson Pollock, George Orwell, Thomas Mann, Dorothy Richardson. But to say that modernism itself came to an end during the decade—as indeed I want to do—is a claim of a different and slipperier sort, even if it touches in part on all of those moments among a great many others.

The slipperiness is of two kinds. First, what is meant by *modernism* is no longer nearly as clear as it once was. The term plainly continues to describe a classical core organized around Joyce, Stein, Eliot, Pound, Faulkner, Hemingway, Woolf, Yeats, Williams, and the like in Anglo-American letters (along with Mallarmé, Proust, Mann, Kafka, and others writing in the major continental languages), producing, for the most part, significant works between 1910 and 1940. This traditional version of modernism, though, leaves out a lot of what was being written during the first half of the twentieth century, both in Europe and America and more broadly in world literature. And then there's an argument to be made that modernism is really about the encounter with modernity, flexibly defined in a way that, when combined with uneven global development and evolving historical conceptions of what we mean by *modern*, might extend modernism backward and forward in time to encompass much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and perhaps further.

These expanded and diversified versions of modernism—which have made pressing claims on our contemporary understanding of what modernism was (or is)—don't, however, have a great deal to do with the context from which modernism as an ideology and a critical practice emerged after the war. It's not that the newer versions of a more encompassing modernism are wrong as descriptions of the period's literary practice, but they don't track the ways in which literary culture at the time understood itself and, hence, don't help us come to grips with the specific intellectual framework of late modernism. Fredric Jameson has done as much as anyone to illuminate this difference, tracing in *A Singular Modernity* the genealogy of what we now recognize as "classical" high modernism and its associated ideology through the work of Cleanth Brooks, I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom,

Robert Penn Warren, and most significantly, Clement Greenberg and (later) Jürgen Habermas.

It's not that this story about New Criticism and the ideology of modernism is new on its face, of course. Scholars have long seen modernism and New Criticism as tightly linked, largely through the New Critics' appreciation of selected modernist poetry as a crowning aesthetic achievement. The New Modernist Studies, moreover—now some fifteen or twenty years old—has been consecrated above all to expanding the range of phenomena collected under the heading of modernism and to pointing out just how much of the early twentieth century's cultural production was excluded by the New Critics' narrow focus.[1] But what we can now recognize much more clearly is the extent to which the perceived unity of high modernism was an active invention of the fifties, a naming of the prior period's practice that also made the practice it identified nearly untenable.

How so? Well, what the ideologues of modernism identified as the core of the earlier field was its insistence on the value of novelty as such, which they (the later exponents) explained as the necessary condition for any art that hoped to treat the fundamentally new state of modernity in an adequate way. The problem, of course, is that if any of the products of the desired torrent of invention are successful in ways that lead them to be picked up, repeated, and stabilized as representational forms, the value of novelty as such necessarily drops, since it is then in competition not with exhausted forms but with living, successful ones. Even more problematically, to the extent that the drive for novelty itself (rather than its products) becomes a kind of representational principle such that new instances of formal invention aren't strictly new but are instead repetitions of a "style of the new," then there really is nowhere for writers and artists to go. They can repeat older forms, falling afoul of the imperative to innovate. These writers are either forgotten or are, eventually, the primary figures of postmodernism; if we were to put a period name to this strand, it would be Nabokov's. Or they can repeat the drive for novelty and become the second apparition of Joyce or Pound or Stein. Which is to say, not Joyce or Pound or Stein at all, whose contribution was to have been the first coming of themselves. This was Beckett, in shorthand, who showed exactly how far it was possible to go within the bounds of the classical high-modernist imperatives.

What we see, then, in the writers of the fifties who labored under the codifying ideology of modernism—which ideology also represented the end

of the modernist practice it consolidated—is, beside a more or less doomed attempt to innovate beyond the conventionality of innovation, an obsessive treatment of their own artistic predicament. They wrote a lot, in short, about the impasses of art itself. While a related sort of reflexivity or self-regard is often associated with the classical view of high modernism, what we're talking about here is something different. High modernists *performed* aesthetic uncertainty in a way that made it easy to read their work as being *about* the problems of artistic representation, but only very rarely were those problems their direct subject matter. As we'll see, the case of the late modernists is very different, largely because the context in which they worked was one that finally and successfully codified the ideology of modernism in novelty and experimental freedom.

When we talk about late modernism, then, we're talking about a set of intellectual and social conditions that plainly didn't include the totality of what we would now recognize as modernist literature but that just as plainly did shape a band of literary output in the fifties and early sixties that we continue to see as important. That's point one. Point two brings us back to the problem of endings. Specifically, what it means for something as large and diffuse as *modernism*, even in the restricted ideological sense under consideration here, to have ended at either a point in time or over a relatively brief window of years. In one sense, this is absurd. You don't need to be a full-blown aesthetic Habermasian, one who sees modernism as an incomplete project and a recurring pole of contemporary thought, to believe that there continue to be published books that display most of the significant features of high modernism and that are, in some sense, still modernist. If ending is tantamount to categorical extinction, it's not a bar that will often be met in the realm of culture. Even the datable examples at the beginning of this section make the point clearly: McCarthy was censured in 1954 and died in 1957, but when, exactly, did the postwar Red Scare end? Institutional segregation was illegal after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, but we know that neither segregation nor the racism that drives it has disappeared in the six decades since.

I'll have much more to say about the dynamics of these sorts of transitions in the chapters ahead, but for now, two points may help clarify the issues involved. First, the current problem regarding the extent and limits of modernism is a specific instance of the general issue of cultural dominants. We should understand, at this late date, that such dominants are not mat-

ters that are played out in every instance where they might be expected to shape some aspect of a culture. Some—perhaps even most—modernist-era texts weren't themselves especially modernist in form or content. The same goes for postmodernism in the second half of the twentieth century. Nor do the forms and preoccupations a cultural dominant produces exist only during the period of its dominance. What is unique is the conjunction of aesthetic forms and the social context of their operation. Thus, what it means to write stream-of-consciousness narration, for example, in the fifties is something quite different from the "same" writing in the 1920s (or, again, with Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina* in the 1870s). What ended in the fifties, then, wasn't a set of literary or social features—although there were indeed important changes to both—but the imagined stable conjunction of those features in an earlier period.

Second, we're right to ask how these changes in the nexus of aesthetic form and cultural context took place and over what period of time we could reasonably say they occurred. The details here are indeed the substance of the rest of the book, but I would observe, for framing's sake, that the transition appears to have taken a bit more than a decade, a much shorter span than the ideology of modernism held its historical object to have endured (conventionally, about fifty years from the turn of the twentieth century through the end of World War II). During the transitional period, it's easy to imagine a type of gradualist evolution, one in which the conjunction of modernism was increasingly abandoned in favor of an array of new modes. And that's not entirely wrong. But what appears gradualist in sum, I'll argue, was the result of numerous specific interventions in literary and social production, each born of a perceived incompatibility between the old and new regimes. For this reason, it continues to make sense to speak, at least some of the time, of the move between modernism and its successors as a break, even when the full rupture rose to dominance over the course of a decade.

Mapping the Present

As I have suggested, one of the reasons to care about the transformations of the fifties is because we find ourselves, today, facing a similarly unsettled cultural moment. There's a growing sense, in literary studies and elsewhere, that the key features of both postmodern aesthetics and the social conditions to which they once responded no longer obtain. On the literary side, we've seen in recent years wide interest in personal narrative and

memoir-like fiction, as well as revivals of conventionally realist forms, both of which represent attempts at the type of historical thinking that was largely (and necessarily) absent from paradigmatic postmodern texts. On the side of the economy and social structure, it's not clear that the finance- and transportation-led globalization of the seventies and eighties is the same as the network-inflected version of the twenty-first century, nor that, even if the two are ultimately continuous, they demand the same cultural forms as one evolves into the other.

How best to characterize twenty-first-century literature and whether or not to treat the new century as a period unto itself are areas of active, if inconclusive, research.[2] But we might note that allegorical and encyclopedic texts have once again become oddly prominent of late. David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is an especially striking and widely studied example, combining cultural allegory with accumulative encyclopedism in ways rarely seen since the early sixties, ways that strike many readers as importantly symptomatic of our era. The reception history of Wallace's novel is important, too; like Gaddis's *The Recognitions*, critical interest in the book built slowly enough that it has been assimilated into a slightly later narrative than its 1996 publication date would suggest. It belongs, at this point, as much to the twenty-first-century literary canon as to the late nineties'.[3]

It's not just *Infinite Jest* that combines allegory and encyclopedism in the twenty-first century, of course. Consider the rise of highbrow genre fiction by authors ranging from Colson Whitehead and Junot Díaz to Emily St. John Mandel and David Mitchell, all widely read as having produced strongly allegorical works, in part because the turn to genre itself is an invitation to allegorical reception. Their books, too, are for the most part long, episodic explorations of specific worlds, described in depth but without particular closure, removed from their readers' possible or presumptive experience—which is to say, these texts are examples of accumulative encyclopedism of the type that defined serious literary output in the fifties. The contemporary preference for encyclopedic works in translation—Roberto Bolaño, Haruki Murakami, Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan tetralogy—is surely related, as is the expansive world-building of other English-speaking writers, including Marlon James, Donna Tartt, and Hilary Mantel. And in all of these cases, the allegory in question is literary as well as social, counting the troubled, unsteady status of fiction after the turn of the millennium among its tenors.

There are thus important contemporary continuities with the late mod-

ernist texts of the nineteen fifties, although they are hard to see except through the lens of the event and its consequences. Our current preference for encyclopedic meta-allegories—strange as it is, and as different as contemporary novels are from their midcentury counterparts—is what we'd expect to find if we understand literary systems as characterized by periods of stability and moments of revolution. It is in this sense, rather than in any particular echo of style or content, that fiction today resembles that of the fifties. It is in this sense, too, that contemporary fiction most clearly indicates the potential end of its time, the longer era of the postmodern. By framing the problem of late postmodernity in these terms, we have both a better chance of recognizing its literary consequences and a compelling reason to examine in depth the kinds of transitional moments that our own situation repeats.

With that overview in place, it's time to turn to a detailed account of both the mechanics of revolutionary events in more concrete terms and the ways in which the specific literary turn of the fifties played out. The next three chapters address the first part, explaining in depth the relationship between allegory, encyclopedism, and discontinuous change across a range of time periods and literary-social contexts. The second half of the book, beginning with chapter 5, uses that theoretical and historical framework to explain the oddities at the core of midcentury fiction and to argue for a set of portable links between the immediate postwar period and literary eras that we usually describe in very different terms. In a perfect world, readers would tackle the thing from front to back, since the individual pieces make up a single story about literary history. But if you want to skip around, there's enough of a through line that you may be able to find your way in any case. Just don't complain if you read twenty pages on *Invisible Man*, only to find that they're as much about the role of arbitrary closure in unsettled literary times as they are about the meaning of Ellison's novel as a whole.

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I THE STRUCTURE OF LITERARY REVOLUTIONS

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2

Allegory

> Because the earliest rude world was too crude and uncivilized and people could not therefore correctly grasp and understand the teachings of wisdom and heavenly things, wise men had to conceal and bury what they had discovered for the cultivation of the fear of God, morality, and good conduct, in rhymes and fables, to which the common people were disposed to listen.
>
> —Martin Opitz

If we want to understand late modernist fiction, we need to begin with one of its most unlikely features. There's an odd allegorical streak in many of the books written immediately after World War II, a tendency to maneuver around the period's most important questions. Think of the authors involved, the ones that have come to typify the period. If you were forced into the fool's errand of list-making, you might point—on the American side—to Ralph Ellison, William Gaddis, Jack Kerouac, Vladimir Nabokov, Flannery O'Connor, Ray Bradbury, J. D. Salinger, and Sylvia Plath. In Britain and further afield, there are George Orwell, Doris Lessing, William Golding, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, and maybe Günter Grass and Chinua Achebe. That's certainly not everyone, but it would be hard to claim that those fifteen names aren't a decent shorthand for what we now recognize as the core literary developments of the late forties through the early sixties. And marvel at the number of allegorists, or at least allegorical works, among their number! Nearly every one.

What's going on here? At first glance, it's hard to say. There was no sharply renewed Christian culture that might have brought with it a return

to one of the medieval period's most successful religious forms. There was censorship on occasion, to be sure, but none of the authors in question wrote books that attempted to smuggle illegal political content under cover of a neutral surface narrative. Yet the books seem too many, or at least too large a fraction of the period's major output, for their allegorical turn to have been a simple coincidence.

So why should the allegorical mode—in which a text conveys one cohesive and independent story while simultaneously building another, more important, narrative on top of it—have been a ubiquitous feature of postwar fiction? Why couldn't (or wouldn't) these texts say what they meant more directly? This is an issue distinct from modernist difficulty or obscurantism; we're talking about books that can be easy enough on their surface and, indeed, in their "concealed" or "real" meaning as well. But they work in a specifically bi- or polyvalent way, maintaining two or more mutually aligned narratives. If you are an author, you don't do such demanding work unless you have to.

The short answer, I think, is that in the aftermath of the war there was a serious lack of fit between modernist techniques of representation and the cultural content in service of which those techniques were deployed. It was clear by the fifties that modernism as a set of intellectual concerns and aesthetic practices had largely run its course, but it wasn't yet obvious what concerns and practices would take their place, so the literature of the time worked with what it had, in service of an end that wasn't entirely in sight. It told the stories it knew how to tell in the ways it knew how to tell them, hoping in the process to bend both the narratives and their forms toward the more productive alternatives that it couldn't yet articulate. The large-scale similarity to our twenty-first-century literary and cultural moment is hard to miss, troubled as it is by the waning of consensus around postmodern forms without, as yet, any widely accepted replacements.

For a more complete answer, we need first to take a closer look at the differences between past eras in which allegory enjoyed sharply diverging fortunes. And we need to do that by way of the first modern theory of allegory, namely, the maddening bundle of apparent contradictions that is the work of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's material—concerning the Baroque and the nineteenth century—runs on its face somewhat far from our concerns in the postwar period, but it's also the best way to see how and why some eras are allegorical while others are not. Treating Benjamin's theory of alle-

gory as a unified whole also helps to account for what are otherwise puzzling inconsistencies in his early and late writings, which otherwise look to be in sharp disagreement about ruins and symbols and such. So while the point is to explain allegory in terms of its cultural context in a way that carries over to the mid-twentieth century, there's something in it both for critics of earlier areas and for Benjaminian theorists along the way.

Baroque Allegory

Benjamin's early theory of allegory, developed in the *Origin of German Tragic Drama* by way of the Baroque and its successors, begins with an examination of the symbol, which Benjamin argues was misconstrued by the Romantics. The problem, he claims, is that the Romantic conception of the symbol treated it as the manifestation of an idea. In doing so, the Romantics consigned the symbol to a position of mediation between the subject who perceives it and the disembodied essence it represents. This is in marked contrast to what Benjamin calls the "genuine," theological conception of the symbol as a "unity of the material and the transcendental object."[1] The distinction is an important one; in the Romantic case, the symbol is only incidental to an experience that involves fundamentally subject and object and that does not manage to collapse fully the distinction between them. In fact, it seems possible that it will reinforce their disjunction insofar as it (the symbol) may in practice function imperfectly, that is, fail to vanish transparently, with the result that the subject will establish a relationship with the representation of the object as provided by the symbol rather than with the symbolized object itself. Benjamin's theological symbol, on the other hand, is a dialectical synthesis of physical and immaterial objects. As such, it eliminates the need for representation and with it the rigorous separation of perceiving subject and represented object. The canonical example of the theological symbol is Christ, who is not a physical representation of God but *is* God, made material while remaining nonetheless transcendent. Christ's death can then redeem the sins of man not because He is the synecdochical representative of mankind but because, as the unity of transcendence and materiality, He *is also* mankind, which makes his death also man's death.

Whether this theological conception of the symbol can function outside a religious context seems an open question, since it is not clear by what power other than divine intervention in metaphysics the interchangeability

or interpenetration of immanent and transcendent objects can be achieved. So long as the prevailing worldview is essentially Christian, however, it is possible that this uncertainty will not arise or will not be considered pressing, because the distinction between religious and secular literature (or between soul and intellect) will not be seen as an importantly ambiguous one.[2] Likewise in a fully secularized period, this problem is unlikely to give general pause, having been consigned to the consideration of specialists in theology. In a secularizing (but not yet fully secularized) age, however, it can cause substantial difficulty for those who produce and consume literature and literary knowledge. This seems to be a plausible description of both the Baroque and the Romantic periods, though of course in quite different ways, not the least of which follows from their relative historical positions with respect to the Enlightenment.

The Romantics inherited from the Enlightenment a world in which the mystical connection of material and immaterial objects in the theological symbol was not regarded as an adequate explanation of symbolic effectiveness but in which some form of unmediated symbolic effect was nevertheless considered both plausible and desirable. This is the conviction underlying Samuel Taylor Coleridge's description of, and preference for, the symbolic in poetry, as well as the basis of William Wordsworth's conception of the poetic relationship between man and nature. Coleridge writes that

> an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principle being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol (*ὁ ἔστιν ἄει ταυτηγόρικον*) is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it annunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of the Unity, of which it is the representative.[3]

This conception effectively reverses an earlier, fully Christian relationship between the symbol and theology. It proceeds from the assumption that it is the symbol that is epistemologically valid because it is not estranged or abstracted from the "Reality" and the "Unity" that are its substance. We may, therefore, argues Coleridge, depend upon our knowledge of symbols to derive knowledge of the entities or ideas they literally embody, a principle

that extends even to theological cases. Allegory, because it is insubstantial, can provide no such assurance of knowledge; it merely represents by substituting one abstraction (its "picture-language" vehicle) for another (the abstract "notion" that is its tenor), never coming nearer to the substantiality that he insists is a necessary component of true knowledge.

Coleridge's continued emphasis on materiality as the basis of knowledge is an intermediate formation in the larger movement, then in progress, away from a Christian worldview. It continues to privilege incarnation (now in the generic symbol rather than necessarily in Christ) even as it offers a new, tropological basis for the theology that spawned the original preference for material manifestation. It does not, however, represent a dialectical response to a situation that seems to require one, in which sacred and secular or technological orientations are contending for interpretive hegemony. Instead it forces the two alternatives together without resolving the tension between them, arguing for the possibility (even the inevitability) of empirical support through the symbol for the transcendence that remains the final object of knowledge. Or at least this is what Coleridge claims to have done; as Paul de Man observes, his conception of the symbol as fundamentally material is rendered doubtful by his use of "translucence," which suggests little in the way of solid materiality and is indeed difficult to distinguish rigorously from the disparaged "reflection" held to be characteristic of allegory.[4]

This slippage in Coleridge's—and by extension in Romanticism's—treatment of the symbol may not have carried as far as Benjamin's critique of it would suggest, but it remains an important difficulty. The problem is in essence one of representation. The ideal Romantic symbol does not represent at all, because it collapses idea into experience. But this position is either empiricist, in which case we may reasonably ask in what way it is related to poetic (rather than scientific or historical) expression, or it is mystical, in which case it is a matter of direct revelatory experience rather than of second-hand poetic account. The problem in both cases, however, is the same: experience must be made available at second hand. When an accepted guarantor of the fidelity of representation exists, whether it be God or nature or the market, representation can pass as presentation, standing in lieu of direct experience. Coleridge's suggestion is that the material world can play the role of this guarantor, that it has in fact displaced God in becoming the way to Him rather than vice versa, a position that seems plausible on a wide scale only after the Enlightenment. And while we're not all the way there

yet, the agreed-upon (material) basis of Romantic knowledge will ultimately explain why the Romantic age was an anti-allegorical one, just as were the periods at the beginning and end of the twentieth century. For allegory to thrive, our ways of knowing and communicating knowledge need to be more unsettled.

In the seventeenth century, however, one encounters at most a premonition of the post-Enlightenment material-spiritual reversal, not its attainment. The secular and divine worlds remain antithetical, though the clear consensus of the former's subservience to, rather than independence from, the latter suggests a relationship between them. As Benjamin explains, allegory helps to elucidate the nature of this link. The shifting relationships between symbols and their referents in heraldry and emblems, he writes, had already shown that

> any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility a destructive, but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance. But . . . all of the [profane] things which are used to signify derive, from the very fact of their pointing to something else, a power which . . . can sanctify them. Considered in allegorical terms, then, the profane world is both elevated and devalued. This religious dialectic of content has its formal correlative in the dialectic of convention and expression. For allegory is both: convention *and* expression; and both are inherently contradictory. (*OG* 175)

Baroque allegory is thus an attempt to mediate between the divine and the secular. It does so not, as will the Romantic or theological symbol, by conflating them (regardless of which one takes precedence over the other) but by establishing them within a narrative context. This has several important consequences for allegory as it existed in the Baroque period, as well as for a general understanding of its forms.

The first and most readily apparent to us today is derived from Benjamin's insistence that context influences interpretation through the dialectic of convention and expression. This relation, combined with the arbitrariness of reference observed in emblematics, might suggest a perpetually allegorical world, one in which each representational expression points beyond itself to another, equally arbitrary or conventional version of itself, ad infinitum. But as a practical matter this is not what we observe in the historically specific examples considered by Benjamin. With regard to the emblem books,

he points out that there was a time when they functioned unproblematically, so that each element of an emblem could be read as the logical condensation of a clear, readily apparent idea. These emblems constituted a form of shorthand notation, which meant that they were not, strictly speaking, necessary, because the information they conveyed could have been communicated directly (as when it was collected into books of heraldry, for example). The particular epistemological paradigm of the historical period in which emblemata functioned unproblematically need not be known to us—it is enough to have evidence that it did indeed exist.[5] As Benjamin observes, however, this transparency of emblematic meaning was becoming recognized as unreliable in the seventeenth century, in part due to conflicting schemes of contemporary codification and in part due to the persistence of "meanings handed down from the ancients" (*OG* 174, quoting Giehlow 36) that were no longer felt to be compatible with any of their modern counterparts.

Once such unreliability was introduced, the "destructive, but just verdict" against the profane world derived from its lack of semantic specificity could quickly follow. The terms in which it was to be leveled, however, could not have been entirely clear, since the problem itself stemmed from a difficulty or instability of representation. In this case, a critique of the new situation would need to be made indirectly or would become effectively indirect insofar as the old mode of representation and interpretation had been eroded without its successor having yet emerged. It is allegory that does exactly this: it communicates a meaning that, for whatever reason, cannot (or will not) be stated immediately (in the literal sense, without mediation).[6] Thus it is allegory that became the preferred literary mode of the Baroque era as its authors attempted to map out a new relationship between the sacred and the profane.

As already suggested, the relationship between these two terms needs to be considered in a way that is historically specific. Baroque allegory responded not to a general, ahistorical dialectic between the religious and the secular—an ahistorical dialectic is probably a contradiction in terms—but to the matter as it stood at the threshold of the Enlightenment and to that moment's specific problems of representation. Where the earlier prevalence of allegory in the medieval period may have been accurately explained by Martin Opitz as a necessary response to a "crude and uncivilized" world in need of religious instruction, the authors of the Baroque era faced a different obstacle in the decay of an existing sacred paradigm.[7] Their response to this problem

was to rely on a form that was itself a kind of "ruin" (Benjamin's term, of course), one that was fragmented rather than unified and that shared with ruins a manifestation of the antagonistic relationship between nature (as a force of decay) and history (as a constructive impulse). The ruin is a man-made object stripped of its details and ornamentation by an extended confrontation with the natural elements; it retains parts of its original design, but it is altered in ways not foreseen by its creators. These alterations are, moreover, shocking in the way they defamiliarize objects even as those objects remain recognizable as the understructure of what they once were. The idea—though not the details—will be the same when we come to the fifties, when allegory will again present the estranged relics of its recent past.

All of these points corresponded to the principal features of Baroque allegory and the epistemological situation to which it responded. Unlike the symbol, the effectiveness of which was based on the unifiability of vehicle and tenor (and of author and reader), Baroque allegory maintained the divisions between them without displacing entirely the idea of their relationship as supplied by the formal dialectic between convention and expression, itself allegorized for the Baroque through the interplay of history and nature in the ruin. Convention, the reified form of historical consciousness, found its form in the unified and orthodox object of human agency, whereas expression, its necessarily fragmentary and heterodox antithesis, consisted in the uniquely determined, individual disintegration of that object. When the contradictions of religious belief were beginning to be perceived but could not yet be addressed directly, tragedy offered to the Baroque allegorists an ideal historical formation on which to perform the expressive, particularizing work of transformation through decay.

Trauerspiel altered the conventional metanarratives of tragedy—the inevitable triumph of divine will over human agency, say—into something no longer obviously explicable—unmotivated suffering or repetition in place of progress toward resolution and catharsis, for example. These inexplicable narrative objects were then to be collected and stored as the raw material for a new schematization and as the basis of a new knowledge that would make sense of them, but which the age was not yet ready to produce. In creating these objects, *Trauerspiel* pointed toward the crisis in representation that underlay it by demonstrating both the failure of a previously established form (tragedy) to stabilize meaning in the way it had once done and the necessary contradiction of using a language "heavy with material display"

(*OG* 200) to explicate an immaterial theology. It did these things, however, without proposing a solution to the crisis. A return to the pre-Christian pantheon was clearly unworkable, as the transformation of tragedy into *Trauerspiel* showed, while the turn to empirical science that would eventually authorize the Romantic reversal of immanent and transcendent priority in the symbol was still a century off. Thus Baroque allegory, even as it worked on themes derived from tragedy, served primarily as a marker or symptom of the changing dialectical relationship between theology and nature.

Baudelaire, the *Arcades*, and the Commodity Form

There are a number of reasons why this view of Baroque allegory has not generally been tied to Benjamin's later work on Charles Baudelaire and allegory in the *Arcades Project*. In addition to mundane issues—the *Arcades* was not translated into English until 1999 (though many of Benjamin's derived writings on Baudelaire were available earlier); there exists little other work linking the German Baroque to the French nineteenth century; the periods themselves are sufficiently removed from each other as to discourage unified treatment—the more fundamental factor inhibiting study of Benjamin's theory of allegory as a singular object is the presence of what appear to be several important contradictions or incompatibilities between his views in the two texts. In the *Ursprung*, for example, Benjamin maintains an apparently neutral stance toward progress and teleology as they apply to the process of allegorical interpretation, while in the *Arcades*, he explicitly shuns progressivist historiography. On this basis, myth is much more rigorously differentiated from allegory in the *Arcades* than in the earlier book. A Marxian analysis of commodity production is also a prominent feature of the latter work but is entirely absent from the *Ursprung*.

Although it is conceivable that Benjamin modified substantially his understanding of allegory after he wrote the *Ursprung* (and doubtless there were changes), it is also possible that the continuity between the early and late work is more substantial than is usually recognized. One of the things that makes this continuity difficult to perceive is the historical specificity of the allegorical impulse. If the argument offered in the preceding pages is correct, it is likely both that some eras will produce more and better allegorical writing than will others (they will be "allegorical" ages in a way that others are not) and that allegories produced during different eras will have divergent emphases and techniques. The actual allegorical production of

one period may, therefore, look markedly different from that of another, a situation likely to obfuscate whatever is common to them both. Studies like Benjamin's, which develop a theory of allegory only incidentally to a broader examination of a particular period, are bound to appear even more divergent or inconsistent in this regard. On the other hand, the breadth and diversity of Benjamin's subject material can help to produce a theory of allegory that does not mistake the particularities of any one period for fundamental features of the form itself.

The claim to this point has been that allegory is a response to a crisis in representation, a crisis that was brought on during the Baroque era by the waning of Christian hermeneutic hegemony before the clear emergence of an alternative worldview. This set of circumstances produced an awareness of the dialectical relationship between the divine and the secular without providing the terms (or concepts) through which their synthesis could be thought. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did provide these terms, which were, in extreme shorthand, experimental science and its technological derivatives, empire, and commodification. Of these it is clearly the commodity that most interests Benjamin in the *Arcades*, especially in connection with allegory. The commodity, he argues, had appeared to solve, through the mechanism of monetary exchange, the problem of relating objects that have no natural connection to one another. This fact, coupled with commodity fetishism—which replaced "the mutual relations of the producers . . . [with] a social relation between the products"—allowed any relationship, whether between objects or between abstractions (such as social relationships or ideas) to be expressed in objectified (monetary) terms.[8] With this "solution," the widespread motivation for allegory essentially disappeared; any object could be represented by the value embodied in its monetary equivalent and any abstraction or relationship between ideas could be cast as involving only objects. If any two things could be set in relation to each other in a way that was stable and widely recognizable, there was no broad crisis of representation. This was true even if, as Marx and Benjamin both observe, it is not possible to determine in advance the exact relationship between value and price in any individual transaction; it is enough that the market provides a mechanism for transforming the value crystallized in commodities into its visible and universal equivalent—the money commodity—that is taken as reliable by its participants.[9]

The nineteenth century was for this reason an anti-allegorical era. This

is not to say, however, that allegory was entirely unavailable to it but merely that the conditions were not such that allegory would become its dominant aesthetic form. Charles Baudelaire, though important to our contemporary understanding of modernism's prehistory, was one of the few writers of his time to work against the grain of transparency established through the commodity. By examining his work as signally marginal in this regard—by reading Baudelaire as allegorist in consequence of his position outside the primary interpretive scheme of his day—we can thus hope to gain a better understanding of allegorical function in relation to historical context.

Benjamin explains the relationship between commodity and allegory, and Baudelaire's place in it, by referring to the difference between the Baroque era and Baudelaire's own. In the former, he argues that

> the fetish character of the commodity was still relatively undeveloped. And the commodity had not yet so deeply engraved its stigma—the proletarianization of the producers—on the process of production. Allegorical perception could thus constitute a style in the seventeenth century, in a way that it no longer could in the nineteenth. Baudelaire as an allegorist was entirely isolated. He sought to recall the experience of the commodity to an allegorical experience. (*AP* 347/J67,2)

This formulation regards the Baroque from an angle different from the one adopted in the *Ursprung* (and followed above) but not fundamentally at odds with it. In the *Arcades*, Benjamin looks back to the Baroque as an era contributing, however indirectly, to the formation of the nineteenth century, which remains his primary object of study. His reading of the relationship between them is therefore performed primarily in the terms of the later era. Thus what is clear in retrospect—namely, that the commodity and the technological, industrial, and mass processes associated with it eventually provided the solution to the Baroque's crisis of representation—is here named as a lack in the earlier period, allowing it to develop an allegorical "style."[10] The affirmative conditions of the Baroque, which are equally necessary for this development, are left implicit in this formulation, but they are not contradicted by it.

More important, however, is the central homology that allows Benjamin to link Baudelaire, as allegorist, to the Baroque. His claims that the poet attempted to "recall the experience of the commodity to an allegorical experience" and that for Baudelaire the "allegorical experience was primary" (rather than following from a conflict between the divine and the secular; AP 324/

J53a,1) are instructive. The centrality to Baudelaire's work of his attempt to allegorize the experience of the commodity suggests both that he (like Marx and Benjamin) identified it as a fundamental feature of his age and that this experience was unsettled or unsatisfactory in a way that called for a specifically allegorical response. This situation might be explained by the way in which the commodity appeared to provide a solution to the problem of the divine and natural worlds as their dialectical synthesis. The commodity was able to provide a mapping between them, becoming in the process the new master narrative of its age. Unlike the situation of the Baroque, however, there was no general perception that this master narrative was inadequate, but this state of affairs obviously did not preclude individual nineteenth-century authors, Baudelaire among them, from distrusting the reliability of representations mediated by the commodity form, even when they could not command a compelling alternative with which to oppose it.

This difficulty was of course not an individual failing of the nineteenth-century allegorist, since a critique of the prevailing interpretive schema is always illogical or incomplete insofar as it fails to make use of that schema's categories and methods. The implication is that allegory in Baudelaire's time had the structure and function of prophesy, as it would again in the first half of the twentieth century; it pointed toward a changed condition but appealed only to those who already held what was by definition an irrational belief in the inadequacy of their current system. The claim that Baudelaire's allegory made, visible to us today if not to his contemporaries, was that the rule of the commodity as interpretant contained within itself a lack or contradiction that would eventually render it untenable as the guarantor of meaning, just as Christian theology had done. As I suggested in the case of the Baroque, allegory was the appropriate, and perhaps the only, vehicle for this critique. It allowed the problem—the arbitrariness of price formation and the fetishization of the commodity that covered it over—to be framed without suggesting that there was an available solution to it. To do otherwise, to insist that allegory had or could arrive at a superior method by which to communicate a determinate meaning, would be merely to repeat the issue in new terms. It was better, then, to demonstrate the possibility of looseness in meaning without going beyond it to suggest that it could yet be eliminated in a new way.[11]

What Baudelaire shared with the Baroque, then, was neither subject matter, nor worldview, nor technique in any normal sense. It was instead an

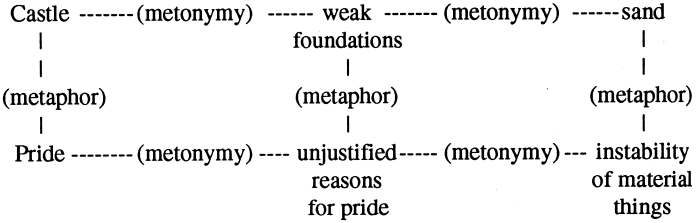
intuition both that their ages understood themselves in terms that failed to cohere stably and that the response they could offer to the problem was itself necessarily tentative, that it would undo itself as well. Baudelaire's meta-allegorical "Allégorie,"[12] a text surprisingly rarely cited in connection with Benjamin and the *Arcades*, demonstrates this problem in the stubborn obscurity and ambiguity with which it glosses its title and in the connection it draws between allegory and the prostitute, who is the idealized incarnation of her age's interpretive scheme, replacing as she does a relation between humans with a relation between things. Baudelaire's characterization of allegory as a woman removed from the world while welcoming it with open arms is an apt figuration of Benjamin's views in the *Ursprung* and the *Arcades*. In both cases, allegory is open to the situation that produces it even as it draws away into mystery and contradiction. To the charge that this explanation is a kind of obfuscation, Benjamin seems content to agree, subject to the proviso that the matter could not really be otherwise resolved.

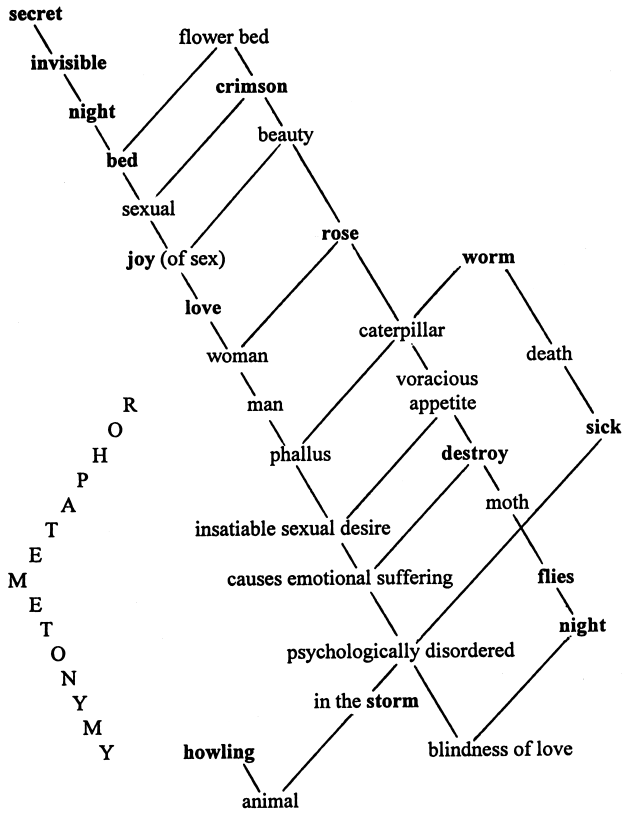
Allegory, Critique, and Conservatism

This view of allegory as advancing, at least in some instances, a kind of radical critique of the epistemological structures underpinning the situation from which it emerges and, even where this critique is muddied or unsuccessful, serving as a symptom of those structures' unsuitability or contradiction, stands in contrast to certain traditional understandings of allegory as necessarily conservative. The basis of these traditional readings—typified for the Baroque by Opitz's assessment of historical allegory's strictly didactic value and more recently by books like Sayre Greenfield's *The Ends of Allegory*—is a move to separate allegory from other tropological techniques, to treat it less as a generically applicable mode of representation than as the name given to any indirect presentation of an existing set of beliefs. This move from technique to content doubtless occurs partly because allegory is particularly well-suited, given its extensive nature, to conveying the intricacies and complexities not of individual points of doctrine (religious or otherwise) but of entire systems thereof, an end to which it has indeed often been put. This connection remains, however, a contingent one in two senses. First and most obviously, allegory has no necessary connection to any particular belief system, historical associations with the teachings of the Christian churches in the Western tradition notwithstanding. Second and more importantly, there is no reason to believe that allegory necessarily works, in

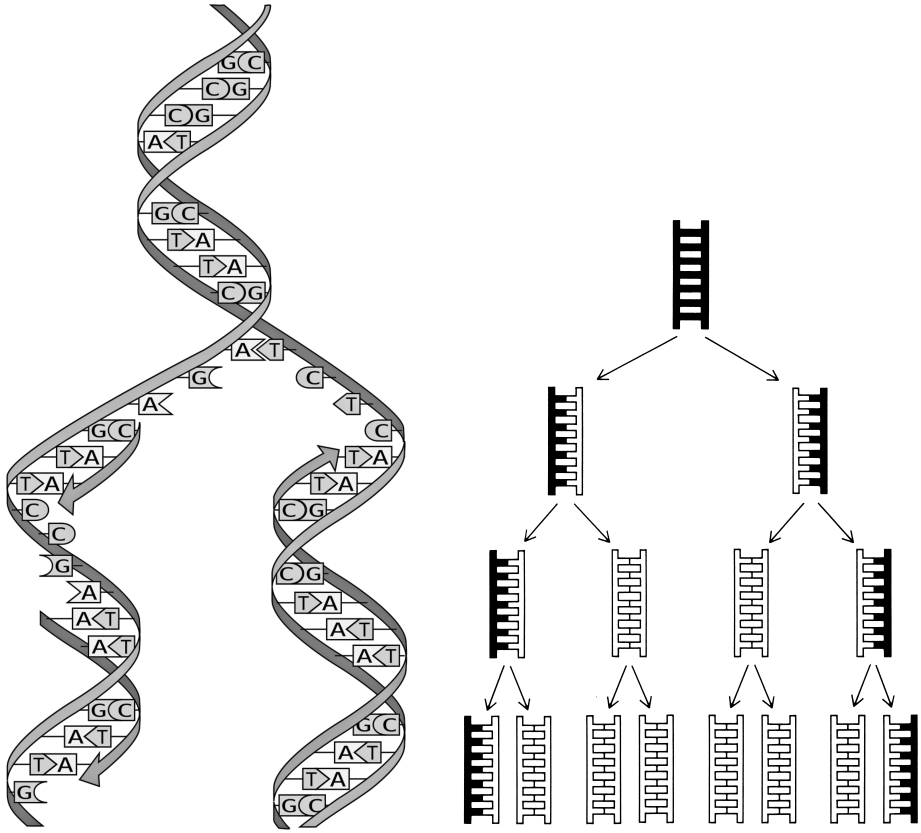
contradistinction to all other tropes, backward from abstract tenor to concrete vehicle. The theory of allegory developed over the preceding pages holds that the work of the Baroque allegorists and of Baudelaire takes on second and third meanings that remain obscure, or at least ambiguous, to author and reader alike precisely because they must be constructed from the given text and its existing context rather than imported, directly and whole, into it. It would be a mistake, of course, to suggest that this construction of allegorical meaning is not deeply connected to the existing beliefs of those who perform it, but this claim differs sharply from the typical assertion that the process is one strictly of "recognition" or of "already knowing what we will see" (Greenfield 77).[13] The difference is obviously important for any theory that links allegory to revolutionary change.

The problem for those who treat allegory as conservative is that both individual beliefs and entire worldviews are clearly subject to change and that the processes by which they are altered may just as clearly include literary ones. In *The Ends of Allegory*—a book that is valuable primarily for its highly conventional, Romantic-derived critique of allegory as merely reproductive and hence superfluous—Greenfield is at pains to maintain a place for "radical" literature, but he faults allegory for failing constitutionally to occupy it. To see why this is so, it is necessary first to understand the image underlying Greenfield's (and, implicitly, many other contemporary authors') theory of allegorical structure. Writing after Maureen Quilligan's and Carolynn Van Dyke's seminal studies of the form, Greenfield is careful not to suggest directly that the figurative meanings of an allegorical text are altogether external to it; there must exist within the text structures linking its literal to its abstract significations. These links are, he claims, metaphoric, and are to be distinguished from the "purely metonymic" relationships between individual elements of each "parallel" narrative. What this view produces is a schematic diagram of allegory that curiously but closely resembles a textbook illustration of a DNA molecule, one in which the stable, information-bearing nucleotide chains correspond to the allegorical "levels," while the fragile, easily "unzipped" bonds between base pairs represent the occasional, tenuous metaphorical linkages between them (see figures below). This similarity is more than a piece of scientistic trivia; it reinforces, in a way that few readers could miss, the primacy and independence of the individual narrative levels while simultaneously suggesting a degree of co-involvement between them such that each is fully and necessarily entailed in the other.





Two of Greenfield's schematic diagrams of allegory. From Greenfield 64, 67. Greenfield, *The Ends of Allegory*, 1998. Printed and electronically reproduced by permission of Associated University Presses.



Textbook illustrations of DNA structure and replication. (a) Madeleine Price Ball. (b) From Ayala and Kiger 110. Ayala and Kiger, *Modern Genetics*, 2nd ed., 1984. Printed and electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., New York, New York.

Mutual entailment means that the levels are directly translatable—or, to preserve the biological metaphor, transcribable—into each other.

Just as the two chains of a DNA molecule can contain identical information only if the pairing rules for their constituent bases are fixed and reliable, this mechanistic view of allegory depends on a deterministic understanding of metaphor. This is one of the most important assertions of the conventional critique of allegory and the one on which the entire theory of allegory as a conservative mode rests. The way in which Greenfield develops

his view of metaphor is counterintuitive, in that it depends on a realist epistemology not of metaphor directly but of what he variously names "association," "contiguity," or "proximity," all synonyms for *metonymy* and all recalling the Romantic preference for the "immediacy" of the symbol. "Contiguities," he claims, "exist or else do not—no ambiguity" as objects of our perception and hence as the basis of knowledge; they are "found," whereas metaphors (as "similarities" rather than contiguities, invoking the conventional distinction inherited from Roman Jakobson) are "invented" (143). Whatever the philosophical problems entailed in this kind of realism (and they are legion), one might have imagined that it would favor metaphor—and hence the allegory that relies on it—as a destabilizing (because creative) technique. Greenfield's analysis, however, treats metaphor (and all other knowledge about, or description of, the world) as strictly derivative of metonymy, which remains for him the single originary (because perceptual rather than conceptual) form of experience. Metaphor, he claims, is merely the settled, accepted sense of a given metonym; social agreement alone accounts for its ability to carry meanings beyond the blunt fact of the juxtaposition on which it depends. Novel metaphors are, according to Greenfield, an impossibility—not metaphors at all but contiguities, which is to say, figures that associate through literal textual proximity two objects not previously so connected. On this reading, metaphor proper is always already invented, available to author and reader alike in culturally fixed form alone. In this manner he defines away disruptive metaphor, and with it the possibility that any allegorical text can inscribe a meaning not already known to the reader.

But is there any reason to subscribe to this view, one that would clearly shock the Nietzsche of "On Truth and Lie" and his many descendants, Benjamin among them? The answer must be no; metaphor and metonymy do not represent ontologically distinct forms of relationship between objects, a point Barbara Herrnstein Smith has made eloquently and at length in her *Belief and Resistance*. What Smith argues regarding the "microdynamics" of belief in general applies equally well to the more specialized problem under consideration here. "Beliefs," she writes, "may be reconceived as . . . configurations of linked perceptual/behavioral tendencies of various degrees of strength, continuously formed, transformed, and reconfigured through our ongoing interactions with our environments" (44). Metaphor and metonymy, as "beliefs" about the connections between objects or ideas, differ from each other at most quantitatively, not qualitatively; metonymies may in general

constitute more immediately recognizable or forceful connections than do some—or even most—metaphors, but this fact (if indeed true) in no way warrants the conclusion that metaphor stands outside the system of mutual interaction and modification Smith describes. There is nothing to stop us, after all, from making sense of new metaphors in the same way we make sense of other novel experiences, textual or otherwise—namely, by working to fit them into an existing web of beliefs, a process that necessarily reconfigures, to a greater or lesser degree, both the new object and the existing beliefs. That certain new experiences, textual or otherwise, seem especially disruptive or radical amounts to saying that they relate to existing beliefs in strong but conflicting ways. Assuming these experiences cannot simply be ignored—which itself represents an active response insofar as it involves discounting on some basis an experience that does relate, however problematically, to one's existing beliefs—making sense of them, normalizing them, will require a reconfiguration of one's existing beliefs so as to minimize the conflicts and contradictions between them.[14] Nothing in this understanding of disruptive experience appeals to the "reality" or immediacy of the experience itself; instead, it invokes the strength of that experience's connection to existing beliefs that coexisted peacefully in the past but are put into conflict through the mediation of the new experience.

Greenfield's mistake—one that is entirely typical of anti-allegorism new and old—is to assume that the tension between old and new beliefs is to be resolved by something inherent in the novel experience itself rather than the set of beliefs that condition it. On his theory, the world (books included) presents to us the concrete existence of "proximity" with which we must come to terms. This coming to terms, moreover, must take place in such a way that it does not distort or misrepresent the empirical fact of the proximate association (found and necessary, we are told, not invented or conditional). His version of metaphor cannot accommodate new proximities because metaphor is for him always secondary to metonymy; it represents the older metonymies on which it is necessarily based. New metaphors thus cannot create true novelty—since what appears to be new in them is either simple juxtaposition (hence metonymy) or else the repetition without modification of existing connections between objects—and existing metaphors cannot accommodate novelty (take on new meanings) without betraying the metonymies on which they are based. Metaphor functions for Greenfield, therefore, simply as a stable, reliable conduit between metonymies or, to return

to the image suggested by his diagrams—and hence to allegory proper—as the bond or translation between determinately related objects.

Greenfield's theory represents, on the one hand, a return to the Romantic critique of allegory, now with metonym inserted in place of symbol as the valuable, because immediate, relation between figure and world, and metaphor, the distinguishing device on which allegory crucially depends, a mere mechanistic translation of it.[15] Once this Romanticism is clear it becomes easy enough to extend to it the Benjaminian critique developed in the previous section and to conclude that Greenfield and the strand of critical thinking he represents are, roughly speaking, two centuries out of date.

More interesting, perhaps, is the identification of allegory with epistemic or ideological conservatism and stasis, which was Greenfield's original motivation for the excursus on metaphor and metonymy. While Benjamin's texts and the analysis above attempt to make clear that a view of allegory as pointing unidirectionally from existing beliefs "down" toward their concrete manifestations is fundamentally mistaken, Benjamin is willing to concede that such a mode does exist. Myth, he claims, is the "antithesis" of allegory and the "abyss . . . that gaped beneath [Baudelaire's] feet at every step" (*AP* 268/ J22,5). Although the details of Benjamin's views on myth vary over the course of his writings, he maintained as early as the *Ursprung* an opposition between it and allegory.[16] Unlike allegory—which makes novel use of existing materials in order to point toward, if not actually to create, new structures of thought—myth uses existing structures to cover over the novelty of new materials by presenting them as the resumption or perfection of an older order. Even on this conception, however, myth is not necessarily as reactionary as it may appear; Benjamin observes apropos of the Fourierists, for example, that as "each epoch dreams the one to follow," it seeks to reject the immediate past (on which, however, it draws heavily for its content) in favor of a future "wedded to elements of primal history [*Urgeschichte*]—that is to say, to elements of a classless society."[17] It is of course not true, however, that *Urgeschichte* is simply available for uncontested presentation as the alternative organizing principle to that of a contemporary society. This is perfectly clear in Benjamin's own example, where "classless society" is revealed as the ideological content in the service of which primal history is invoked. The contrast with respect to allegory, however, remains undiminished; mythology stands outside of history, as a story told *about* history, whereas allegory represents a direct response to—and intervention in—a historical moment.[18]

Myth, then, is conservative in a technical sense to the extent that it operates on the basis of continuity, presenting itself as timeless and constant even when it is deployed in particular, historically contingent contexts. The necessary implication of myth, moreover, is that neither belief nor narrative need suffer discontinuities or aporia; the acts of the gods, for example, lie open to examination and explanation by the humans they so closely resemble, just as the events of primal history are directly available to explain any contemporary moment.[19] This is in stark contrast to allegory, a form organized around an aversion (necessary or strategic) to direct narrativization of its central concerns. Unlike myth, allegory depends upon and is suited to an attempt to narrativize these breaks in historical consciousness.

3

Event

> Nothing will have taken place but the place, except perhaps a constellation.
>
> —Stéphane Mallarmé, "Un coup de dés"

Breaks in historical consciousness are moments that are especially well suited to allegorical narrative. But what are these breaks and how should we understand their relationship to the historical contexts from which they emerge? We need to be able to answer these questions if we want to explain why the literature of the immediate postwar period—which responds to just such a break—looks the way it does.

There are a number of potentially useful technical terms from philosophical and historical studies that correspond to the informal idea of discontinuous change, including such diverse entities as Thomas Kuhn's paradigm shifts, Michel Foucault's events of thought, Marx's social revolutions, and even the conjunctures of Fernand Braudel and the *Annales* school.[1] In each of these cases, the term in question condenses an attempt to understand a punctuated equilibrium of one sort or another, that is, a situation (however construed—this will become a technical term in the analysis below) that remains stable over relatively long periods of time but undergoes rapid change on comparatively rare occasions.[2] Although any of these specifically deployed concepts might be pressed into duty as a general framework under which to develop a theory of the relationship between (specifically allegorical) narrative, the conditions or circumstances of its production, and its (necessarily temporal) role in altering those conditions, none has exactly the desired combination of systematic elaboration and generic portability across both intellectual domains and historical periods.

Better for the present purposes is Alain Badiou's theory of the event as the opposite or complement of being.[3] While Badiou's approach has several shortcomings and gaps in coverage that we need to address, his abstract treatment of the event as a change in the dominant procedure of enumeration provides the best available account of the mechanisms by which one regime of knowledge or practice gives way to another. Suitably modified and expanded, the framework provided by his *L'Etre et l'événement* guides our understanding of the transitional moments—like that of late modernism—that give rise to punctually distinct narrative forms such as allegory and encyclopedism while also enabling the eventual emergence of new, more stable representational alternatives.

Badiou's work first came to the attention of anglophone critics largely through his shorter, polemical late-career works, which began to be translated into English around the turn of the millennium.[4] The centerpiece of his philosophical system—and he certainly is a systematic thinker, scattered evidence of the early translations notwithstanding[5]—is, however, *L'Etre et l'événement* (1988), a text that builds on his earlier *Théorie du sujet* (1982) and has been extended by the more recent *Logiques des mondes* (2006).[6] The prominence of the lesser works in anglophone debate is unfortunate both because it has led to the impression that Badiou is a covert theologian or (less covert) antiliberal pamphleteer and because it has produced frequent misunderstandings of the technical concepts explored at length in the systematic works.

In the following analysis, however, what is of interest is the development and use of the term *event* alone, a task that can be accomplished in detail with minimal references to Badiou's work outside *L'Etre et l'événement*. A brief overview of Badiou's larger project is nevertheless necessary in order to situate his use of the term *event* and to define a range of concepts to which it is necessarily bound. Some of this material is technical, but it hangs together remarkably well and is indispensable for the larger investigation of the mechanics of periodization in general and of late modernist fiction in particular. In outline, the argument proceeds from *being* to *event*, that is, from how we understand the things that exist in the world to the way in which that understanding changes in exceptional circumstances. It moves from a mathematical treatment of ontology, through the various kinds of entities in relation to the situations that define and contain them, to the distinct types of situations themselves (which will be called "truth proce-

dures," though it's perhaps best not to attach too much importance to that name), and finally to the definition and mechanics of the event itself. In every case, the operation of counting or enumeration is critical; what exists at a specific time and in a particular place is what can, in principle, be counted as a thing. If what's countable (not what's actually counted, but what *can* be counted) changes, we find ourselves in an ontologically distinct world.

Again, what follows is a pretty deep dive into the theoretical underpinnings of revolutionary change. But we need to have it in place if we hope to understand what's going on in the late modernist situation of the nineteen fifties and if we want to see how late modernism itself serves as an exemplary instance of revolution in general.

Set Theory and Ontology

Badiou's meditations in *L'Etre et l'événement* begin with the ancient problem of the one and the many. His central claim is that "the one, which is not, exists only as [an] *operation*. Or again: there is no one, there is only the count-as-one [*compte-pour-un*]."[7] This curious proposition is for Badiou not a derived result but a foundational axiom, one on which both his ontology and his theory of the event rely.[8] Like any axiomatic proposition, its proper test comes in the persuasiveness and utility of the results that can be derived from it. For Badiou, the first implication of multiplicity's priority over unity is the necessity of reconceiving ontology along set-theoretical lines. This has been an area of both particular interest and a certain anxiety in the secondary literature owing to the significant technical demands of fully elaborated mathematical set theory, but the basic points are relatively straightforward.[9] The first of these is that a set is strictly equivalent to its members; if two sets contain the same members, they are equivalent.[10] The second is that the members of a set may be random and therefore do not necessarily share any common property beyond their membership in that set. This point is important because it relates directly to one of Badiou's central concepts—not to mention a fundamental driving force of set theory—namely, the empty or null set—written { } or ∅, and also sometimes referred to by Badiou as the *void*.

As the name implies, the empty set is a set without members; it is of interest here for two reasons. First, it provides a set-theoretical basis for the natural numbers ("counting" numbers; 0, 1, 2, . . . *n*), numbers that historically provided an intuitive argument (contra Badiou) for the priority of

unity over multiplicity; and second, it designates the entity that is included in all sets. To see why both of these statements are true, we must first distinguish inclusion from membership. The members (also called elements) of a set are those entities that belong to the set directly; in Badiou's parlance, they are presented by the set.[11] Inclusion refers to subsets of a given set; an element is included in a set if and only if it comprises no members that are not members of the set.[12] This in turn introduces the concept of the power set, defined as the set of all subsets of a given set. Logically included in the power set are always ∅ and the set itself, which implies that any power set will contain 2^n elements, where n is the number of elements in the original set.[13] More importantly for Badiou, it implies that there are always more potential configurations of the elements counted as one within a set than are presented by the set. He calls this set of potential configurations that is the power set the "metastructure" of the set, in contrast to the structure defined by its actual elements.

Situation and State

At this point the more broadly philosophical and political mappings of set theory begin to take over from the strictly mathematical ones as objects of interest for the present project. The basis of these mappings is the equation of set and *situation*, which Badiou defines broadly as "any presented consistent multiplicity, thus: a multiple and a regime of the count-as-one, or structure" (*EE* 557). A situation therefore determines the entities that exist, even as the collection of those entities makes up the situation itself. As a practical matter, actually existing situations are always infinite, though this is not to say (of course) that they include every configuration of elements conceivable under their metastructure. The metastructure of a situation, also called the situation's state, corresponds to the power set of its members, that is, to the set of all possible subsets of the original set. What this means is that the state of the situation (and Badiou always has in mind, at least in part, the political sense of the word *state*) represents an exhaustive (though infinite) collection of the possible entities that *might* exist according to the logic of the *compte-pour-un* of that situation.

To make things more concrete, situations are for Badiou in practical application generally conceived as large-scale social organizations, such as the contemporary techno-scientific liberal-capitalist state or the sociopolitical configuration of Europe in the years before the French Revolution, though

they may also describe more specifically limited domains.[14] Situations comprise, as noted, an infinite number of elements both material and conceptual or logical—such as, for instance, citizens, nation-states, dogs, Valentine's day, rock music, the internal combustion engine, and so on. (Don't try to make sense of this selection. The point is that there isn't any.) The state of the situation comprises all the potential groupings of these elements, each such grouping itself constituting a single, countable element of the state. Two points are important here: first, the number of elements of the state of the situation is not only infinite but is infinitely greater than the infinite number of elements of the situation itself, which means that infinite unrealized potential configurations always exist within a situation.[15] Second, the state of the situation nevertheless ought not to be understood as the set of all things that might ever exist, or it should be understood that way in only a contingent sense. The state of the situation remains derivative of the existing elements or structure of a given situation and its regime of counting-as-one. So long as the situation remains static, its state does specify all of its potential configurations; hence, everything that might exist in that situation. But if this regime changes—in other words, if the entities that count as such change—then a different and unforeseeable situation and state will necessarily follow. Another way of framing this important point is that infinity is not equivalent in any strong sense to totality.[16]

To move toward Badiou's understanding of the event, which depends on an exceptional realignment of the fit between a set and its members, we must examine the relationships between the elements of a situation and those of its state. For the most part, elements of a situation are what Badiou calls *normal*, meaning that they are members of both sets and are therefore simultaneously presented by the situation and represented by its state. In what follows, it will be helpful to refer to the following exemplary set:

$B = \{1,2, \{1,2\}, \{1,2,3\}\}$.

Note that B is a four-membered set of the form $C = \{\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta\}$, comprising the members 1, 2, {1, 2}, and {1, 2, 3}. The elements 1 and 2 are normal, as is the element that happens to comprise them, {1, 2}, which we might imagine, for example, as a family made up of individual citizens. By definition, no member of B is an *excrescence* [*excroissance*], a term Badiou uses to designate elements of the state that do not appear in the situation itself (elements of the power set $P(B)$ that are not members of B). When he speaks of excres-

cences, he seems generally to have in mind—again emphasizing the political mapping of "state"—governmental institutions, "bureaucratic and military machinery" (*EE* 125), which are clearly real parts of the state but nevertheless do not appear as singular elements of its situation. This seems dubious, since it is not clear in what sense a government ministry or intelligence service, for example, is less directly present than the normal family mentioned above. The scales are admittedly different, but there is no set-theoretical basis for a distinction between the two. Peter Hallward proposes a similar, but more plausible example when he describes a covert platoon of the army, one that is fully recognized by the state (which must account for it, equip it, give it orders, and so forth) but that remains effectively invisible as a unit within the situation (normal members of the situation do not know of the platoon's existence, though they do know of its individual constituent members) (*Badiou* 99).

Even this reworking, however, is not entirely satisfactory insofar as it turns on a particular (lack of) knowledge on the part of individual members of both the situation and its state rather than on the conceptual unity or disunity of the platoon in either case. The problem is that the platoon in question does in fact exist as a recognized element of the situation; it is simply not recognized by everyone in the situation. If this distinction between generalized and individual knowledge is relevant, it suggests that situations and their corresponding regimes of counting as one must be much more narrowly conceived; there is one situation for the public and another for those military commanders, lawmakers, etc., who know of the platoon's existence. This may not be a problem, but it would likely mean abandoning as unworkable or severely limiting in scope the kinds of broad world-historical situations described above. More to the immediate point, it would eliminate excrescences by casting disagreements about their existence not as matters of nonalignment between situation and state but as incompatibilities between different situations. I argue below that this is a productive move, but it is one that is hard to reconcile with Badiou's structure-metastructure dualism and his interest in excrescence as such.

As a final alternative conception of excrescence, one that seems easier to reconcile with the reading of power sets as collections of possible (though infinitely unrealized) configurations, I propose a social group not recognized as such within a given situation; students as political actors before May 1968, for example, or gay men and lesbians (in our contemporary sense)

before the nineteenth century. In these cases, individuals potentially belonging to the unrecognized group exist within the situation, and the group that collects them as a unified entity exists within the state of that situation (since the state includes all possible configurations of the situation's elements), but the group is not an element of the situation itself. This understanding poses fewer problems of direct conflict with the mathematical model under consideration, but it is clearly in a certain tension with Badiou's political model of the state, in which excrescent entities are much more concrete and effective even within the situations from which they are formally excluded. Still, it moves us closer to the elemental type linked most directly to the event proper.

The problem of excrescence is related to Badiou's third and final type of entity, the *singular*.[17] Singularities are for him and for the present project both the most important and the most difficult class of entities, although their technical definition in relation to set theory is straightforward. A singularity is in a sense the opposite of an excrescence; it is an element of the situation that is, paradoxically, not a member of the situation's state.[18] There are immediately obvious technical problems with this definition, but we should first examine Badiou's usage and apparent meaning. His own example, from meditation 16, is a family, one of the members of which is "clandestine," who never appears in public, is not counted in census data, etc. (194). The family as a whole—as a unified element of the situation—is then said to be singular because it is not made up entirely of elements that themselves appear individually in the situation. Hallward's similar example again treats a platoon, now with one member AWOL (or perhaps equivalently, MIA) such that he disappears from the situation entirely, in which case the platoon is singular insofar as it includes an element that cannot be discerned in the situation.[19] Switching back to symbolic notation, we can examine the elements {1, 2} and {1, 2, 3} of set B (as defined on page 37); the first, {1, 2}, is normal, while the second is singular because one of its members is not itself an element of B.

Politically speaking, these examples are reasonable enough, but it is difficult to reconcile them with the mathematical model from which they are said to derive. This is for two reasons:

1. First, the inconsistency identified by Badiou takes place entirely within the situation itself, rather than between the situation and its state.

This problem is related to that of excrescence above; in both cases, what begins as a problem defined by the nonalignment of situation and state ends up turning on entities that do or do not appear—or are or are not recognized—solely within the situation.

2. Building on the first point, it is not at all obvious in what way the number 3 (or the hidden family member or the AWOL soldier) can be said to constitute an element of its situation. The problem is that the members of a set are by definition counted as one, which is to say unified (in the literal sense, *one-ified*). Recalling that the logical form of *B* is expressed by $C = (\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta)$, how is it that *within situation B* we are able to, as it were, "open up" the δ term to find within it something that by definition is not itself an element of the situation? In other words, how is it possible that 3 is counted as one without becoming a member of *B*?

Badiou is not, of course, blind to this perplexity, and it is from such difficulty that we can move, finally, toward a direct engagement with the event. Broadly speaking, an event is a change in the structure of a situation, that is, an alteration of its regime of counting as one. A singular element of a situation is the potential *site* of an event because a change in structure—a change in what counts as an element of the situation—will find within that element a new element that was not previously present. Another way to put this would be to say that the event renders distinguishable or individually unitary elements that were previously unified, or that it transforms unities into composed multiples, and vice versa. It is obvious that the event is thus a temporal, or better, a historical figure insofar as there is always one situation that exists before it and another, comprising different elements, after it.

There is a good deal that needs to be unpacked and elaborated here. First, the description proposed in the last paragraph, like the analysis of excrescence above, effectively does away with the need for a distinction between situation and state as comparable entities within the situation of ontology. Badiou himself says as much near the end of meditation 8 when he writes that "it is clear that as a theory of presentation, it [the ontological situation] must also be a theory of the state, that is to say draw out [*dégager*] the distinction between inclusion and membership and give meaning to the count-as-one of subsets. But its particular constraint is to have to be, as regards itself, 'stateless' ['*sans état*']" (*EE* 116). The easiest and least para-

doxical way to parse this claim is to understand ontology as the theory of the abstract kinds of things that can exist and the kinds of relationships or groupings that may exist between and among them.[20] It is clear that mathematics—specifically, post-Cantorian set theory—as we currently understand it provides a powerful set of categories (multiplicity, infinity, the void, membership, inclusion, etc.) on which to base this project. If we are entirely persuaded by Badiou, we will admit that set theory is the only coherent basis for ontology available to us.

But even if we concede this point, there are two types of claims that do *not* follow from it:

1. The link between set theory and being does not entail a transhistorical claim concerning the identity of mathematics and ontology. The supposition of this identity is, if we are persuaded by Badiou, the most productive basis on which to ground ontological speculation. It may even be the only useful basis of which we can conceive. But it is still a supposition in a sense analogous to a scientific theory. This point will emerge more clearly as the relationship between event and situation becomes more fully elaborated.
2. Set theory does not entail any specific claims concerning actually existing entities. Ontology has nothing to do with the specific elements that are counted as one in any situation other than that of pure set theory, except insofar as they can be treated in full abstraction, which is to say as set-theoretical entities. This is a reassertion of the traditional claim that ontology in concerned with being, not beings.

Badiou is of course clear on these two nonentailments, though the examples he uses to illustrate the three types of members of a situation, combined with his ambiguous metaphorical use of the term *state*, seem to invite the kinds of entanglements and apparent contradictions I described previously.

It would be better to understand ontology in relation to what Badiou calls the four conditions of philosophy or, equivalently, the four generic truth procedures. These conditions or procedures are politics, science, art, and love; they represent the four distinct domains in which independent truths may exist. This description requires a definition of truth, which Badiou provides as the process of fidelity to an event, which we might gloss as a commitment to following out the implications of a particular counting-as-one or, equivalently, of the identification (naming) of a particular singu-

larity. Because we are still moving toward a full understanding of the event, this definition is in a way premature, but it is impossible to make sense of the event if we do not first have a functional, noncontradictory meaning of the term *situation*, with respect to which the event is always relative. If *situation* can be understood not as a single regime of the *compte-pour-un*, but instead as the product of (at least) four such regimes, it becomes much easier to see how a singular element of the situation may be at once counted and overlooked, especially if we equate the state of the situation, at least in the immediately effective sense, with the literal state as constituted by the generic procedure of politics. This move eliminates the paradoxical double duty of the state (as both a collection of possibilia and a concrete institution) described above by splitting it into ontological and political components identified only through the accident of a shared name and an imperfect metaphorical resemblance. The political state identifies and counts entities comprising elements of the situation, but it is necessarily selective and exclusionary insofar as its regime of counting differs from those of the other generic procedures.

Any political state is, moreover, a historically situated entity, and it is in conjunction with history that events in Badiou's sense can be said to exist. "Historical" situations, we should note, are distinct from what Badiou calls "natural" ones; natural situations are those comprising only normal elements, a usage analogous to Kuhn's "normal science," though applicable to the situation as a whole, or at the very least to any one of the generic procedures. They are thus free of singularities, which is to say, free of differences between the (ontological) situation and the state concerning what is counted as one. Historical situations are then defined in contradistinction as those containing at least one "evental site," an element that is an "absolutely singular multiple," an element none of whose constituent elements are presented in the situation.[21]

For reasons that may already be apparent, I take the idea of a natural situation to correspond in some sense to the nonallegorical periods discussed above with respect to Benjamin and the Baroque. What remains unclear, however, is whether or not natural situations exist in any but a tautological sense; as already shown, the presence or absence of a singularity depends on a temporally located identification of that which was not previously counted in a particular situation.[22] Any existing situation is thus by definition both actually normal (it is constituted by an effective regime of the count-as-one)

and, at the same time, actually and potentially historical. It is the result of a previous declaration of what counts as one, and its *compte-pour-un* might always come to be seen, eventually—or even inevitably—as flawed. Unsurprisingly, Badiou is interested almost exclusively in historical situations; the same is true in this book.

The Event and Its Matheme

What, finally, is an event? It has already been described, somewhat informally, as a change in the regime of the count-as-one. Badiou's more technical definition, what he calls, following Jacques Lacan, the *matheme* of the event, is:

$$e_X = \{x/x \in X, e_X\}.$$

This definition assumes that X is an evental site (that is, an absolutely singular element) within a situation S such that $X \in S$ (X is an element of S, X is presented by S). The notation then reads "the event consists on the one hand of all the multiples belonging to its site, and on the other hand of the event itself" (*EE* 200). Another way of putting this would be to say that the event consists in the reconception of X as composed of the elements x_n belonging to it, a reconception that is possible only in and through the event itself.

There are two points of particular interest in relation to this formulation. First, the self-membership of the event clearly violates the axioms of set theory. Specifically, it violates the axiom of regularity, which requires an "∈-minimal" (smallest) element in every nonempty set.[23] The axiom of regularity is also the basis of counting as one, so it is not surprising that the breakdown of the regime of counting as one—a defining feature of the event—should involve a violation of regularity. What this implies is that the event is not an ontological object, that it is not to be understood in terms appropriate to the enumeration of beings.[24] Second, the eventalness of an evental site, and hence the possibility of an event linked to it, is always dependent on the situation in which it exists. This is true in spite of the previous point regarding the absolute nonidentity of being and event and amounts only to the claim that, because the event consists in counting elements that were not previously counted within a situation, events (and evental sites) depend on what is already counted as one. For example, to treat electrons as having the properties of both particles and waves constitutes in our own

situation a straightforward application of scientific knowledge and is in no sense an event; to do so in de Broglie's laboratory in the early 1920s was another matter. As Badiou explains, "the *negative* aspect (not to be represented) of the definition of evental sites prohibits us from speaking of a site 'in itself.' It is relative to the situation in which it is presented (counted as one) that a multiple is a site. A multiple is a site only *within* a situation" (*EE* 196).

To illustrate his understanding of the event, Badiou invokes the French Revolution, for him an exemplary event. The site of this event is France from 1789 to 1794, including all the physical, technological, aesthetic, sociological, economic, and political details of that time and place.[25] There is no element of the event "the French Revolution" that is not an element of this site. Some (although of course not all) of these elements would also have been, in themselves, elements presented by the situation at the time. What reimposes the absolute singularity that is necessary to qualify the site as evental is the addition of their membership in the event "the French Revolution," which "is an axial term of the Revolution itself, . . . presenting itself as the immanent embodiment and unification of its own multiple" (*EE* 201). Thus, although the peasantry, for instance, was clearly an element of the French situation before the Revolution, the revolutionary peasantry of the *Grande Peur* ("these peasants . . . who storm the châteaux" [*EE* 202]) exists only as a term of the Revolution itself. The same is true of the guillotine, the "Marseillaise," and any of the other elements of the site, all of which are measured against the event. The event thus serves as their axis or index of reference, the thing that allows them to be grouped together into new elements *of the Revolution*.[26]

Is the event then an element of the situation in which its site is located? This is the central question raised by the matheme of the event, and its answer—or lack thereof—is already anticipated there. It is, from the point of view of the situation itself, strictly undecidable; only an "interpretive intervention" can force a definitive answer in any given case by pronouncing "the coming to being of non-being" (*EE* 202). This is so because neither of the potential general solutions—that the event does or does not belong categorically to the situation in which it has its site—is satisfactory. If the event *does* belong to its situation, it is no longer properly unitary; it is present twice, once as the collection of elements that is its site and once as the presentation of the site itself. But an event that is not unitary cannot serve as the basis of a countable multiplicity, and a situation that includes both the event and its

site as elements fails to perform its function as a consistent enumeration of unified entities. The resulting "double" event is directly analogous to the doubling of action in the supposition of an acting subject, a problem long since identified and critiqued by Nietzsche.[27] If, on the other hand, the event is *not* an element of its situation—if "nothing takes place but the place" (203)—then nothing at all can be said to take place, since the elements of the evental site are by definition not presented in the existing situation. Thus the situation would remain static, having already described the site as one of its elements and having nothing to add to this enumeration.[28]

As I suggested above, this undecidability is not permanent and therefore does not represent either a dualism or an equivocation in Badiou. The key is that the processes of occurrence and of identification can be separated in time.[29] It is possible in retrospect to determine whether or not an event has taken place, but only insofar as it is set in relation to other elements of a new historical situation. Thus the French Revolution can be seen as an event—it unifies the elements of its site, which cannot be said to exist unchanged in the absence of the revolutionary event—and as a proper element of what we now understand as late-eighteenth-century France. The event is eventful precisely because it requires and is subject to this retroaction that understands it as a transformative moment. Thus we can say now, in the situation that results from our recognition of the revolution as an event, that the revolution took place in 1789 and that it produced an identifiable collection of new elements proper to it. It is equally possible, of course, that what once seemed to be an event—an incipient revolution or a new scientific breakthrough, for example—will eventually be understood in our present situation not to have been evental, that is, to have represented merely an aspect of the status quo. This is the case when the revolution is quelled (or succeeds, only to become synonymous with the government it replaced) and the existing political order continues substantially unchanged, or when the anomalous results of an experiment turn out to have been either in error or explicable within existing scientific theories. The noneventality of both these cases has to do not with a lack of novelty but with the retrospective ability to see them merely as extensions of an order that precedes and succeeds them.

Events and Narrative

From this point, the route back to narrative and history is a reasonably short one, and proceeds via a final distinction within Badiou's problem-

atic. The event has what might be called two moments or aspects; it appears suddenly and unexpectedly as a punctual shift in (or break from) the situation in which it has its site, but it is also the enduring mark of that break and is a normal element of the new situation to which it gives rise. The relationship between these two moments is potentially difficult; what we require, if we do not wish to see it as simply miraculous, is a way in which to account for the appearance of the event and its ability to transform one situation into another.

The process begins, according to Badiou, with an "evental statement" [*énoncé événementiel*], a declaration not that things *are* other than they appear but that they will have been other than they appear in a new situation that does not yet exist and whose composition is not yet known. Examples of evental statements include "the revolution has begun" and "Christ is risen" (to take two of Badiou's favorite cases), as well as "emission spectra are not continuous" (the statement that leads eventually to quantum mechanics). The last example is important, if only because it emphasizes a point that may be ambiguous in the others: the evental statement is not a perlocutionary speech act, at least not in the usual sense; it is not the heroic or expressive act of a single individual functioning within a system of stable signification. It is instead a kind of slogan, one that calls those who take it up (those who together comprise, in Badiou's terms, its subject) to begin an attempt to identify the indiscernible elements of the site it names. The evental statement says, in effect, "*these* are the kinds of problems we need to study" or "*this* is what is to be done."[30] These statements do not, of course, say anything about the specific elements of a new situation, nor do they discern invisible elements in the existing one. Instead they declare new procedures that will produce as-yet-unknown elements of a new situation. This is a formulation strikingly similar to Kuhn's, whose paradigms are not themselves objects of knowledge, not generated through a steady application of existing techniques, but rather procedures or frameworks of knowledge production. It also bears more than a passing resemblance to Alain Robbe-Grillet's calls throughout the late fifties—also couched in the future perfect—for the development of a new novel that would constitute a revolutionary break from the literary past.[31]

Badiou likewise distinguishes the evental statement and its immediate procedural implications from the application of the procedures to which it gives rise. The first—the analogue of Kuhn's paradigms—he calls a truth

and a truth procedure, respectively; the second he identifies with knowledge. A truth is therefore never reducible to a body of knowledge, truth always holding over knowledge an excess of production. Truths are, for Badiou, in principle (although never in practice) infinite and eternal— they cannot exhaust themselves, cannot be completed in a finite body of knowledge, and do not produce their own obsolescence. Just as Kuhn argued that it is not by following out the implications of one paradigm that a new one is produced, so for Badiou it is not by fidelity to one truth that new truths are uncovered or invented.

It is then by following—in Badiouian language, maintaining a fidelity to—the new truth procedures derived from the evental statement that the possibility of a new situation is brought about. The possibility of a new situation is not, however, the same thing as the new situation itself, and mere fidelity does not necessarily produce an actual change in the situation. In fact, the elements identified according to the new truth procedure will remain, according to the existing situation, both adequately described under other categorizations (waves fall under one set of equations, particles under another) and arbitrarily assembled in the new one (quantum mechanics "confuses" the Newtonian categories of matter and energy).[32] Again, the effectivity here is projective; it consists in identifying terms of the existing situation that can and will take other meanings in any new situation understood in accordance with what is counted by the evental truth procedures. Thus the existence of the truth procedure of quantum mechanics allows that both "matter" and "energy" (as well as "time" and "space") will have new meanings, without initially specifying what those meanings will be; the situation is transformed only when the new meanings are normalized, that is, when they are no longer figural ("it is as if particles have wavelengths") but literal ("particles have wavelengths").

This process of normalization Badiou calls *forcing*, a term borrowed from Cohen's proof of the independence of the General Continuum Hypothesis under the axioms of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory.[33] Forcing, or normalization conceived as a process—a matter of usage, persuasion, and webs of belief—is the sense in which an event can be said to take place, in an almost literal sense of both "take" and "place" as coming to occupy the position of an element in the situation, gradually over time. At the end of this process, which is never really an end but only an establishment of a way of speaking and living, it will be possible to say that an event occurred, punctually, at its

beginning, and that this was the cause of the transformation in the formerly incorrect (false, ideological, etc.) way of identifying and counting entities in the world. In other words, after an event has been stabilized in a situation, its presence can be verified; the analogue in Latour is the claim that after Pasteur discovered microbes (an event in exactly the sense invoked here, and with the understanding that "Pasteur" and "discovered" belong in quotes), microbes always existed, awaiting their discovery. In the same sense, postmodern fiction can pick out a Gaddis or a Nabokov (or even Stein or Mallarmé) as one of its progenitors in a way that's fully tenable only after it has supplanted modernism as a functioning cultural dominant.

This kind of retroaction (in a story told from within the achieved new situation) describes a process of direct narrativization that differs importantly from that which holds during the earlier transitional period. The later story need not be (and generally will not be) a figural one in any explicit sense, because it can make use of a vocabulary that has already been adapted to the concepts it requires.[34] An earlier version—the transitional version—of the same story, however, will be necessarily figural insofar as it can at best suggest the possibility and potential coherence of an existing vocabulary deployed in a new way. With this observation, the argument has now converged on the point at which it left off with Benjamin, having added to it a general framework for understanding events that extends the one derived from his historically specific examples. The description presented earlier of allegory as a dialectical trope now clearly refers to the bivalence of its vocabulary and the temporality of its development. It would be a mistake, therefore, to conceive of truths or paradigms as themselves dialectical in Badiou's formulation; the procedures spawned by and through an event may lead to difficulties and contradictions, but they do not produce their own sublation. The difference in the case of allegory is that allegory is not itself a situation but a technique deployed in the service of a new truth, the content of which remains unknown, but whose procedures (equivalently, its problematics, questions, and assumptions) are already in place and supersede by definition those of the existing regime of knowledge.

To this point, I have argued for the utility and compatibility of allegory and event as terms central to the process of transformation between historical situations. Allegory is a necessary feature of revolutionary events because it provides a temporal and narrative bridge between the very different historical situations on either side of a given event. But the lack of fit be-

tween those regimes pushes in another direction, toward a disordered proliferation of facts and observations in the absence of a single regime of counting. We might identify this opposite pole, which works against allegory in the transitional mode, as the encyclopedia. Encyclopedism is thus the final piece of a narrative theory of revolution.

4

The Encyclopedia as Object and Metaphor

> The word ENCYCLOPEDIA is too familiar to modern literature to require, in this place, any detailed explanation.
>
> —Samuel Taylor Coleridge

As we have seen, periodization is bound up with enumerability. The idea is that historical periods (political, scientific, aesthetic, and so on) are distinguished from one another on the basis of the individual things their subjects can count. What it means to be a subject in this sense—which is linked inextricably to the concept of the event that the subject proclaims and to which it maintains a fidelity—is a problem to be explored shortly. Before we can begin that explication, however, we require a more complete understanding of counting and its difficulties, a task best approached by way of the encyclopedia and encyclopedic narrative, which not only provide a useful occasion for such an analysis but also represent one of the important features of both modernism and its successors. To preview very briefly the conclusion of this work, the accumulative impulse of the encyclopedia is best seen as an expansive force that both resists and provides the raw material for the countervailing connective process of allegory; encyclopedism and allegory thus depend on each other during periods of crisis even as they push in opposite directions. This dynamic of explosion (encyclopedism) and reintegration (allegory) can be seen plainly, for example, in *The Recognitions*, William Gaddis's 1955 novel about the state of art and commercial culture in postwar New York, which manifests both the normative power of encyclopedic production—the book's aim is, at one level, to prescribe to the reader what "counts" as art—and the limitations or contradictions (some intrinsic, some

specific to the novel's situation) of the form. The present chapter develops a theory of the principles underlying several forms of encyclopedism and works out the general relationship between encyclopedia and crisis; the next reads Gaddis's novel as a symptomatic response to the conflicting demands placed on encyclopedic narrative and argues that *The Recognitions* provides an important early step toward a new nonmodernist aesthetic situation.

Organization and Accumulation

Vincent Descombes, glossing the title of his essay "Variations on the Subject of the Encyclopedic Book," itself a compact elaboration of Derrida's proposition that "the idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier," remarks a "double redundancy" in the phrase "subject of the encyclopedic book"; first because all books are encyclopedic in aspiration, seeking to "*go around* [their] subject so as to be equal to" it, and second because "'book' adds nothing to 'subject' . . . the book is . . . the subject properly speaking."[1] The implications of the second equation, if it is justified (Descombes claims, tongue perhaps in cheek, to "substantiate" it by quoting one sentence fragment from Hegel and one from Mallarmé), are to be worked out in the next several chapters; for now it is the first equivalence that is of interest.

The encircling conveyed by the term *encyclopedia* has long been the goal of at least some books. The earliest pseudoencyclopedias were attempts to collect useful information on a range of more or less loosely related topics, often intended, as the *-paedia* half of the name suggests, to condense a comprehensive education.[2] Traces of this encyclopedia-cum-textbook were still found in Jean d'Alembert's introduction to the eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie*, where he described "the general system of the sciences and the arts"—the object his work with Diderot was intended to present—as "a kind of labyrinth" with respect to which the philosophical encyclopedist was to be placed "in a point of view high above, from which he might perceive at once the sciences and the arts" in order to create a "world map" [*mappemonde*] of which the "highly detailed individual maps" were represented by individual articles (Diderot and d'Alembert xiv–xv; translation mine). Whatever the theoretical limits implied by taking the general system of arts and sciences rather than the world in toto as the *Encyclopédie*'s object, the ensuing seventeen volumes make clear that as a practical matter those limits did little to curtail the project's ambitions. More significant is d'Alembert's image

of the labyrinth seen from above, which encapsulates the two major thrusts of encyclopedism: first, to see the object of inquiry in its entirety, to contain it and experience it as a unified entity; and second, to perceive the relations between its parts so as to describe and explain the system as such, distinct from—or supplemental to—the pieces it comprises.

The first of these aims seems to have been present from the earliest encyclopedic texts, which often bore metaphorical titles—"world image," "mirror of nature," "vision of history"—suggesting both the primacy of vision and the comprehensiveness of its reach, to contemporary encyclopedias, which, even when devoted to specialized topics, inevitably claim an authority of scope if not necessarily an exhaustive treatment of their delimited objects. The second aim, systematicity—or what Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in the preface to his own projected conceptually organized encyclopedia, the *Metropolitana*, called "method"—though not so uniformly embraced as the first, is an important response to its impossibility as a practical matter.[3] To be sure, the compensatory function of systematization was not always acknowledged explicitly; for Coleridge, method was required in order to demonstrate what he identified as the "progressive power" of human knowledge oriented toward and evolving steadily closer to a perfect arrangement "of the natural and necessary order of science" standing above "limited physical experience" (634–35). But this demonstration was necessary precisely because to produce a "universal Dictionary of knowledge" would be an undertaking that "the most gigantic efforts of man could not achieve" (674), due both to the size of such a project and, more importantly, to the limits of "physical experience" just admitted, with its attendant errors, confusions, and uncertainties. What Coleridge seems to have been seeking was a type of eternally stable encyclopedia, one that would in principle never need to be updated or supplemented because it would elaborate not the actual state of human knowledge but instead the logically necessary (and in Coleridge's case, it seems safe to say, divinely ordained) system of relationships between its various branches. In a sense, of course, this rendered the whole of the actual encyclopedia superfluous once the two-page schematic "Plan" of the *Metropolitana* had been drawn up,[4] but it also insulated the encyclopedia from the errors and imperfections it might contain by treating the whole, like d'Alembert's labyrinth and map, as an object distinct from its constituent parts.

The tension between these poles, between exhaustion and schematization (the latter a synonym for systematization as presented here), is funda-

mental to encyclopedic texts in the literary or narrative sense, if not necessarily to every encyclopedia proper as presently constituted, many of which abandon any pretense to overt systematic presentation of their contents, functioning instead as detailed, though abridged, dictionaries. Those texts that are more strongly systematic, that is, those that collect their material into a set of categories or other organizing structures that are made explicit and whose relationships are likewise foregrounded can, assuming their schemas are credible, "go around" their subjects with less explicit detail than is required in the absence of such frameworks because they establish a regular space for kinds or classes of material that they do not specifically include.[5] Less systematic texts, if they are still encyclopedic, collect and enumerate the various aspects of their subject, encircling it less by defining its boundaries than by stumbling against them. The *reductio* of the first case is Coleridge's Plan; of the second, the shopping list or the historical chronicle.[6]

Paradigms, Theories, Systems

Although it is clear that neither pole (system or chronicle) is ever fully dominant in a literary work or period—what each produces on its own is not literature at all—it is worth asking to what extent their relative prominence can be linked to changes in the conditions of literary production. To begin, we might note that Thomas Kuhn addressed much the same question in a different context in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, where the concern was to elucidate the relationship between so-called normal and revolutionary scientific practice. Normal science, Kuhn argued, consists in elaborating the consequences of professional commitment to particular procedures and examples (his famous "paradigms"), a process he called "puzzle-solving."[7] Scientific revolutions, on the other hand, involve a change in the rules of the game, a selection of new procedures and examples not directly compatible with the ones they replace. An ordinary mapping between systematization and accumulation in literary texts and the procedures of normal science would link systematization to theoretical elaboration and accumulation to experimental exploration. Experimentalists work to produce the results predicted by theoreticians, while at the same time producing novel results that the theoreticians seek to explain in light of existing models. No matter which takes precedence—and in practice each is always involved in the other—both experimental and theoretical research are expected aspects of the normal scientific process by which the implications of a particular set of para-

digms are traced. This is thus also to say, according to the metaphor at hand, that systematization and accumulative elaboration are expected facets of what we might borrow Kuhn's term to call *normal* literature.

More interesting and much less common is the properly revolutionary case, in which one way of organizing scientific research—or aesthetic production—is replaced by another, a process Kuhn likened to "a switch in visual gestalt" (111). These are of course his much-discussed paradigm shifts, a theory of which he was attempting to develop; most useful for my argument are the features he identified as common to the "crisis" stage of paradigms, which precedes their replacement. For Kuhn, a paradigm is a specific *achievement* (the term is his and is deliberately vague) that for a period of time "implicitly . . . define[s] the legitimate problems and methods of a research field" (10). Achievements that attain the status of paradigms do so because they are at once "sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity" and yet "sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve" (10). A paradigm, like a Badiouian event, delimits and structures the practices of those who operate within its field. Kuhn was clear in this claim of logical priority; normal science—that is, the great bulk of everyday scientific practice—follows from an application of procedures derived from and in accordance with an existing paradigm, whereas "paradigms are not corrigible" or producible "by normal science at all" (122). This is not to say, of course, that a paradigm contains within itself the totality of the results that researchers will eventually derive from it; the processes of normal science, like Badiou's truth procedures, are conducted in accord with a paradigm (Badiou would say "in fidelity to" it) but develop freely and contingently within the constraints it imposes.[8] The existence of a paradigm leads to deep, narrow work within a field, work that is directed specifically toward solving the puzzles that the paradigm itself allows to be formulated.[9] It is possible, even likely and perhaps inevitable, that this sort of focused, paradigm-directed work will lead to apparent anomalies, results that are difficult to reconcile with conventional applications of the paradigm, whether theoretical or experimental. Some of these can be resolved with greater or lesser ease in ways that do not disturb the paradigm itself, but others may remain inadequately explained and can become the focal points of a crisis in the paradigm-based discipline.[10]

A distinguishing feature of crisis is thus the proliferation of important

unexplained and anomalous results, that is, of objects that do not appear to fit within the schemata that a paradigm provides. As Kuhn observed, the identification of these anomalies can be seen as a consequence of paradigm-directed research, and so in this sense we may claim that paradigms produce the *conditions* necessary for their own obsolescence. But as Karl Popper's many critics have long argued, this does not imply that these anomalies falsify the original paradigm in any meaningful sense or that a paradigm will be rejected in the absence of a satisfactory alternative.[11] The model is instead one in which an accumulation of apparently unrelated findings creates a situation in which new paradigms are considered because they have become attractive relative to the diminished standing of the original. The actual emergence of a new paradigm, however, cannot be guaranteed by the crisis, which indicates the desirability of change but not the form that such change may take.

To return to specifically literary production via Descombes's assertion that all books are encyclopedic, we might note that this claim seems plausible insofar as it is understood to address the constitutive incompleteness of any book. Just as traditional encyclopedias are always subject to revision and expansion (the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, for instance, has been under constant revision since the early 1930s, to say nothing of Wikipedia's open editorial model) and thus *may* always contain a literal supplement, any literary text might in principle be expanded beyond the material it contains. The nature of this supplement in the literary case is ambiguous even in what we might call "normal" books, namely, those that can be assimilated neatly under the schema of an existing paradigm. On one hand, a book is finite and so must, like any encyclopedia, abridge aspects of its subject matter that it might just as properly have included. On the other hand, it may also present conflicting interpretations of the paradigm, none of which is worked out so as to decide on the proper or privileged one. It is clear that the first case always holds; any book might be longer or different than it is. The second case, too, will always remain a possibility so long as paradigms themselves remain open to reinterpretation and displacement over time. These claims, however, are near tautologies and do not supply the basis for a meaningful theory of encyclopedic narrative as a class or genre distinct from other literary types. (They might be restated as: "Books are finite objects" and "Books are perpetually open to changing interpretive regimes.")[12] What is required is a way to distinguish encyclopedic works as a situated subset of literary and cultural

production in order to understand better both encyclopedism itself and its evolving role as an index of modern periodization.

The place to begin is with a more rigorous translation of Kuhn's argument and examples into properly literary forms. Most important among these is *paradigm* itself. As noted above, there is an ambiguity surrounding the concept in Kuhn's original text, which allowed him sometimes to treat paradigms as comprising entire systems of theory and practice, or what he later called "disciplinary matrices," and sometimes as referring only to specific individual products or achievements within such matrices. The second use is the more interesting and profound of the two, and so it is this sense with which we'll work. In scientific practice such "exemplars" include, for instance, Galileo's falling body experiments, Lavoisier's isolation and identification of oxygen as a component of air, and Einstein's photoelectric results. The disciplines of rigid-body mechanics, pneumatic or gaseous chemistry, and quantum mechanics that formed around these paradigms then attempted not so much to repeat them as to show how other physical phenomena resembled them and could be treated as analogous examples subject to the principles derived from them. *Theory*, in the scientific sense, is the name given to a proposed set of correspondences between a paradigm understood in the exemplary sense and a range of phenomena that can be seen as similar to it.

It is possible to see literary schools, periods, and genres as working in roughly the same way. If we ask, what is the epic? what is Romanticism? what is a modernist novel? we might answer with a list of distinguishing features (thematic, stylistic, philosophical, etc.), but these are ultimately derivative of a particular collection of paradigmatic works that are taken to define the field in question. In the case of what came, in the fifties and sixties, to be understood as the (bygone) modernist novel, there was broad agreement on the paradigmatic status of texts by Joyce, Proust, Woolf, Mann, Musil, Conrad, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and others. But it would have been much more difficult—impossible, even—to name the last member of this list, that is, to define the exact limit of the modernist novel, whether temporally or otherwise considered, especially if one were interested in achieving the same degree of consensus as accompanied the central figures.[13] What took the place of an exhaustive enumeration of modernist novels was instead a much smaller set of theoretical generalizations, the goal of which was to suggest ways in which the texts resembled one another in spite of their

obvious differences: they were by and large difficult, aestheticizing, concerned with language, privileged novelty, and so forth. The process of producing these generalizations and reading in light of them—something quite different from listing them here—*was* the practice of modernism, just as producing and working with the equations of general relativity and quantum mechanics is the practice of modern physics. Nevertheless, their scope and ultimate coherence can never be entirely clear; like Wittgenstein's family resemblances, what is in play is the degree of functional consensus concerning both the importance of certain features and the degree to which the objects in question possess them.[14]

Literary and scientific periods alike are thus marked by a span of time during which there is greater agreement concerning both appropriate (synonyms for which include *interesting*, *important*, and *rewarding*) subject matter and fruitful technique. Periods, like disciplines, reach crisis when this agreement breaks down, that is, when the people who work with them (authors, critics, readers) begin to feel that the existing theories and practices no longer provide meaningful insight into the problems at hand, or when those problems themselves no longer seem as relevant and important. Such a breakdown occurs in literature, for example, when stream-of-consciousness narration becomes a stylistic adornment rather than an effective rendering of inner life, or when the rendering of inner life itself fades as an object of intrinsic literary interest. Crises are resolved, finally, by reestablishing relative consensus around a new set of subjects and techniques.

This is the Kuhnian outline of periodization, and it will determine the general features of one argument concerning Gaddis's text and his relationship to the modernist tradition that follows. To translate it briefly back into the terms of encyclopedism elaborated in the previous section, we may remark that normal periods, being organized around an effective set of paradigms, may take for granted a great deal of structure provided by the paradigms and their standard elaborations. This means that we would expect to find in normal literature—books written not in imitation of but in accord with or fidelity to the paradigms of their situation—an encyclopedism, where present, of the systematized, extensional type, working either to make explicit the schema to which it conforms or to elaborate those aspects that are expected but not yet fully explored. In the literature of crisis, however, we would anticipate an increase in the quantity and importance or influence of nonsystematized encyclopedism characterized by a priority of observational

accumulation over systematic elaboration, since it is in such cases that shared assumptions concerning the relative importance of individual phenomena cannot be guaranteed. We should also expect a corresponding rise in attempts—often very preliminary or imperfect, and allegory certainly among them—at new forms of schematization to reimpose order of one sort or another on this proliferation of observational material. An evaluation of the extent to which this shift is actually played out in late modernism is a recurring feature of this and subsequent chapters.

Epic, History, and Literary Encyclopedism

The preceding attempt to link encyclopedism to the logic and mechanics of periodization has not been the dominant critical approach to encyclopedic narrative. Favored instead have been two lines of study whose potential complementarity has not been widely remarked. In the first, encyclopedism is seen as the invention or unifying feature of a particular literary-historical moment, most often of the French Enlightenment, but alternatively of the French twelfth century, the Spanish pre-Renaissance, the English Renaissance, or the German Romantic period, among others.[15] In the second, it is argued that there exists something like an encyclopedic tradition or canon, one that may or may not have a readily determined historical origin but that in any case has endured across centuries, embodied in texts that resemble one another more closely than they do those of their own eras, the latter coming and going according to a different logic and governed by different principles.

The ahistoricist view is derived in part from a peculiar reading of Northrop Frye's work on encyclopedism and its relationship to the various literary modes outlined in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. The temptation seems to have been to read Frye against himself as suggesting that the "total body of vision that poets as a whole class are entrusted with" (Frye 55) is linked permanently to a single privileged form. While it is true that Frye saw the encyclopedia as typically growing out of "a scripture or sacred book in the mythical mode" (315), he was explicit both that this alignment was at most a contingent matter of shared interests rather than a necessary function of either's definition and that it could and did shift substantially over time (so much so that it found its supreme, then-contemporary expression in the ironic epic *Finnegans Wake*). The confusion seems to stem from a conflation of Frye's theory of modes, which are indeed pseudo-Platonic forms applicable to the

classification of literature across the ages, with his theory of genres, a much more fluid attempt to describe the range of actually existing families of literature, each of which might incorporate one or more of the modes and all of which are governed by evolving "traditions and affinities."[16] Frye's complicity or lack thereof in its formulation notwithstanding, it remains unclear what use could be made of an ahistorical description of encyclopedism beyond the blunt fact of classification (itself an additional explanation of the tendency to invoke Frye).

More fruitful are the few critics whose work suggests an evolving and reciprocal relationship between the specific manifestations of encyclopedic narrative and the situations from which they emerge. The first to move in this direction was Edward Mendelson, who, in a 1976 *MLN* article that amounted to little more than a research note, proposed an extraordinarily short list of truly encyclopedic works—the *Commedia*, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust*, *Moby-Dick*, *Ulysses*, and *Gravity's Rainbow*—each of which, he claimed, represented a "fulcrum" in its culture "between periods that later readers consider national pre-history and national history" ("Encyclopedic Narrative" 1267–68). While the immediate goal of Mendelson's article was to make a case for the importance of Pynchon's then newly published novel, the link he drew between cultural transformation—specifically, the beginning of a distinct and self-aware national identity—and the encyclopedic form was wholly new and has remained the most interesting aspect of his argument.[17]

In the course of his work, Mendelson derived a useful list of traits common to the narratives in question, including a heavy reliance on synecdoche, a "peculiar indeterminacy of form" (1270), and each work's distinctly retrospective establishment as a monument of its national literature. The first of these encyclopedic traits, prominent use of synecdoche, is a result of and solution to the limits of the book as a physical object. Like those before him, Mendelson saw the nominal objective of the encyclopedic narrative as the "attempt to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture" (1269), but he was well aware of both the impossibility of such a project and—just as important—the obviousness of this impossibility. Rather than claiming that encyclopedic narratives attempt and fail to achieve this sort of mythical exhaustiveness, he pointed out that they tend to select representative subsets of larger fields of knowledge, which they then render in some detail as figurative stand-ins for the unaddressable totality of their cultural situation.

Mendelson's second feature—formal indeterminacy and stylistic "imperfection"—is surely indebted at some level to Frye, who likewise saw encyclopedic forms as comprising several others (novel, romance, anatomy, confession, etc.). In the present case, the point is that the members of Mendelson's canon are all to some degree compendia of form, incorporating the established methods and structures of their day in an attempt not to supersede any one of them but to reflect on the function of form itself.[18] Like Kuhn, who observed that the early stages of a field's development—or of its disaggregation into distinct disciplines—are marked by the need to survey, often polemically, the relationships and contradictions of the existing claims and practices from which its practitioners seek to distinguish themselves, Mendelson argued that encyclopedic texts likewise accumulate literary styles as a means by which to lay bare, whether by simple juxtaposition or by more intricate commentary, their effects as instruments of convention. In both the scientific and the literary case, the attempt is to demonstrate that what appear to be natural or necessary approaches to representation also shape the content they are used to convey.

Finally, Mendelson pointed out that the members of his canon, despite their status not just as markers of the birth of a "national consciousness" but as active elements of its creation, secured their canonical positions only in retrospect, through the creation of "bureaucratic structures organize[d] around their traces" (1273). These structures—largely academic, but certainly also including elements of the culture industries—he argued, domesticate and "routinize" the initially transgressive aspects of their objects. Although Mendelson himself was not explicit in describing this process, it must comprise at least two related moments. First, the objectionable elements of the work itself (its impiety, difficulty, impropriety, formal confusion or impurity, etc.), which generally lead even its defenders to acknowledge it as "flawed," must come to be treated by scholars and practitioners alike as permissible or conventional. Second, the rupture that the work initially represents must become assimilable to a narrative of progress or development in which it can be understood as one in a series of occurrences (or "events," though the conflation with Badiou's technical sense of the word requires further exploration) that together produce a later moment as their telos. This process of routinization, in other words, *produces* the endpoint that it claims merely to recognize as the inevitable outcome embedded in the original object.

Epic and Evolution

For Mendelson, the progression of encyclopedic narrative from transgressive to canonical occurs in a strictly national context, since his small canon is explicitly conceived along national-historic lines. The extent to which this condition is a necessary one, as well as the mechanics of these normalizing or assimilative moments, are the two most important issues left unaddressed by Mendelson's work. The first is properly answered by Franco Moretti, who, in *Modern Epic*, acknowledges Mendelson's influence but quickly drops the "national" from "national culture." What he proposes in place of Mendelson's set of modern cultures distributed and distinguished according to national or linguistic borders is a collection of competing and evolving international modernisms extending from Goethe's day through the present. Moretti argues, along lines conceptually similar to—but temporally displaced from—Benjamin's analysis of the *Trauerspiel* explored in chapter 2, that the rise of the "capitalist world system" around the turn of the nineteenth century unsettled profoundly the experience of modern life. In response, the arts in general and literature in particular attempted to "reduce the tension" brought on by the "ethical impediments, perceptual confusions, ideological contradictions . . . in short, [the] *symbolic overload*" of this transition.[19] There were, on Moretti's reading, any number of specific ways in which such a reduction in tension—*reconciliation* would be an equivalent term—might have been effected, none of which could be predicted in advance. The model Moretti invokes is the biological-evolutionary one raised previously; the idea—though Moretti is never quite this explicit—is that formal aesthetic innovation, like genetic mutation, is occurring continuously but that any individual innovation ordinarily stands only a vanishingly small chance of being incorporated into, and thereby modifying in a lasting way, the existing range of common forms and techniques. Most literary innovations, in other words, are, like most biological mutations, deleterious. This is particularly true in well-established, relatively static situations (whether sociocultural or biological), in which the existing forms and structures have had time to adapt substantially to stable conditions; in these situations, the bar to large functional changes is comparatively high. When conditions are changing rapidly, however, existing evolved forms have a smaller advantage over newly developed ones, since they are adapted to a set of conditions that no longer obtains. In this transitional case, two features are expected: the increased viability, however short-lived, of new forms and structures, which

face less intense competition from highly adapted incumbents; and the redeployment (or "refunctionalization") of existing forms and structures to meet new requirements.

It is the second possibility that largely drives Moretti's consideration of the modern encyclopedic epic, which he interprets as an ongoing struggle on the part of its authors and readers to make use of an ancient tool to solve contemporary problems.[20] If we ask what explains the prominence of the epic form in this case, Moretti's answers are several. His claim (like my own) is not that the epic—or any other single form—is the key to understanding modernity, or even, properly speaking, that it is the era's dominant form. Instead, he argues that the epic was a conveniently available, though largely disused, cultural artifact especially well-suited by virtue of its comprehensive breadth to describing and making sense of capitalism's increasingly global scope. Alternative forms also developed—the symbolists, Woolf, Kafka—but the rise and development of the "refunctionalized" epic occurred without explicit dependence on, though certainly not in isolation from, them.[21] In any case, the epic was non-national or prenational, just as the world system seemed to demand a post- or supranational description; it was, at least in principle, all-encompassing and infinitely extensible, like that system; and it was episodic in such a way that it could be assembled from pieces, apparently without a necessary plan—a trait conducive to rapid and fluid experimentation in the absence of a stable paradigm.

All three of these traits are clearly relevant to a discussion of encyclopedism that extends Mendelson's work. The potentially unlimited range of the epic is a straightforward repetition of encyclopedism's traditional ambition, but Moretti, like Mendelson, is careful to distinguish both the principle from the unachievable object and the classical from the modern case, the former attempting more rigorously an actual encyclopedic enumeration of the world's objects, while the latter, complemented by existing encyclopedias, can satisfy itself with allusive and synecdochical invocations of them. The episodic structure of the epic and the encyclopedia is both a means to extensibility, since it is endlessly iterable (there can always be another episode or entry, regardless of what comes before or after it),[22] and an important enabler of their flexible and multivalent allegory insofar as the discontinuities inherent in an episodic structure form a natural barrier to the imputation of a single allegorical reading. This is particularly true—and especially important—in

the case of transitional and experimental literature, in which both author and reader are working to assemble a serviceable whole from the new and refunctionalized devices they have assembled.[23] "Goethe's great invention," writes Moretti, is "to have constructed, in *Faust* Part Two, *a mechanism that allows readers to make mistakes*" (85, emphasis in original), where we need only to understand that the mistakes in question are deviations from any single authoritative reading of the text. These alternate readings, which supply varied paths through the work and produce different, even conflicting and contradictory meanings for it, are a necessary condition for the kind of suggestive yet unsettled allegory that marks the shift away from a stable situation and its techniques of representation.

Finally, the move to divorce the epic and the encyclopedia from the nation is an important challenge to one of Mendelson's central (though unsupported) claims about the genre. If it is true that, in the case of the modern encyclopedia, national identity can (indeed must) be overridden by a response to and interpellation in the "world system of capital," then it is possible that there exist properly encyclopedic texts that are not (or at least are not primarily) national narratives. Curiously, Mendelson himself suggested this possibility in his work on *Gravity's Rainbow*, which he claimed was the first "international" encyclopedic narrative, but he quickly reassimilated Pynchon to his canon by arguing that the novel was the founding encyclopedia of a new "common international culture" (1272), conceived as a world-scale analogue to the individual nation. Moretti's claim is different, at least in its implications. For him, the reinvigoration of the epic is a response to, among other things, the failure or exhaustion of the nation and its institutions as the organizing principles of a modern experience characterized by the primacy of capital's world system.

Assuming that we credit Moretti's argument, not only does it demonstrate that an encyclopedic form can arise outside Mendelson's national-historical framework, but it also suggests that the transition itself, rather than the specific type or domain of change, produces conditions favorable to encyclopedism. This is the general form of the claim I advanced with respect to *Trauerspiel* and allegory in chapter 2, and it is an important alternative to geographically and historically determined explanations of encyclopedic production. Mendelson and Moretti alike portray versions of encyclopedism arising in response to changes in specific political and economic conditions,

but the logic in each case relies only partially on the details of those conditions; more broadly, they address a response to fundamental shifts in situations and systems as such.

What we find in the literature—and indeed the broader cultural production—of transitional situations, then, are two countervailing tendencies. On the one hand, such literature is marked by the expansive, accumulative strain of epic encyclopedism described above. It is disordered, heterogeneous in form and content, more allusive than tightly referential, and prone to unchecked gigantism. On the other hand, if this literature is not to be simply incoherent, it requires the imposition of some sort of interpretive or relational scheme to hold its divergent elements together. As we've seen in earlier chapters, allegory is the principal mechanism by which such a scheme is imposed, because it allows flexible new structures to be built up link by link and node by node from the unordered material of the encyclopedia. To be clear, this is not the "preferred" structure of normal literature, which has a more or less well-functioning regime of literal signification and no particular excess of accumulation. But evental situations—revolutions, in effect—are by definition those in which normal structures do not hold.

Chapters 5–7 are thus devoted to encyclopedic allegories that both engage events as their narrative objects and participate in evental transformations of their own situations, literary and otherwise. The first of these is William Gaddis's *The Recognitions*, a text in which the difficulty and complexity of the relationship between art, literature, and culture in a moment of crisis is developed at length. Chapter 6 and 7 take up more directly the role of literary texts as evental or pseudoevental sites within the same postwar cultural situation and explain in detail the ways in which these texts shape their subjects.

II FAILURE AND NOVELTY IN POSTWAR FICTION

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Allegory, Encyclopedism, and Postwar America

> —Modern mphht attitudes, don't you know, modern art and all that sort of thing, eh? They try to say their paintings are the spirit of the times, don't you know, but good heavens aren't the times bad enough without having pictures of it hanging all over the place?
>
> —William Gaddis, *The Recognitions*

The account of encyclopedism I developed in chapter 4 helps to explain why encyclopedic texts, especially of the accumulative type, should emerge in association with the breakdown of formerly well-functioning paradigms. I also argued that allegory is the necessary counterpart of encyclopedism in such transitional situations, allegorical interpretation giving shape and legibility to the raw material of the encyclopedia. The studies by Kuhn, Mendelson, and Moretti provide more or less extensive case histories of specific transitions that follow the same outline, though none that frames the problem in this way and none that examines the literary-historical dynamic at issue in the rise of contemporary cultural production. We can begin to assess the accuracy of the theoretical claim concerning the mechanics of the event and to evaluate its explanatory power in an important set of cases by taking up the literary output of this most recent cultural transformation.

Let us begin with William Gaddis's 1955 debut novel, *The Recognitions*. *The Recognitions* was once spoken of, when it was noted, with high regard, though seldom read. Happily this is no longer strictly true, but it would still be a stretch to call Gaddis and his book central characters in most of the stories we tell ourselves about American postwar fiction. This is a shame, and not just because *The Recognitions* is a book that deserves, in spite of its

intimidating bulk, to find its way onto more bookshelves and syllabi. It also represents a missed opportunity to tell better stories about late modernism—the vital period spanning the nineteen fifties and early sixties, including work by Vladimir Nabokov, Sylvia Plath, Ralph Ellison, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Samuel Beckett, Doris Lessing, and Gaddis himself—and about the intriguing literary-historical dynamic linking the two halves of the twentieth century.

The Recognitions is a rare and valuable model through which to evaluate the mechanics of the move away from modernism after World War II, which is to say that the book shows us how such a transition could have taken place, even as it refuses (or fails) to embody or schematize the shift explicitly. It is thus important to revisit Gaddis's novel in part to correct the mistaken critical notion that *The Recognitions* can be profitably read as a manifestation of its protagonist's (the painter Wyatt Gwyon's) straightforwardly antimodern aesthetic, that is, that the novel (and to a great extent the larger cultural field it represents) is in any sense devoted to a systematic pre- or postmodernity. While it is true that the text is deeply involved with the contradictions of the postwar period, its own development is entirely contrary to Wyatt's program of "disciplined nostalgia," and indeed to the idea of any explicitly oppositional program with respect to modernism. To read the novel as essentially analogous in thrust—as devoted to articulating a cohesive rejoinder to modernism—is thus to mistake its technique and effect alike. Rather than a muddled dissertation on art, the text, like many of its contemporaries, is an allegorical response to precisely the difficulty of such a project and is therefore illustrative of both the specific crisis of literary modernism in the postwar years and of the technical and epistemic demands imposed by any such moment of transformation. If we can come to grips with how *The Recognitions* understands, presents, and intervenes in late modern literary culture, we will also have identified many of the outlines and mechanisms of both evental transitions in general and late modernist fiction in particular.

Set almost entirely in 1949 and 1950, and primarily in New York City, *The Recognitions* is most readily identifiable as a satirical account of the relationship between art and commerce at a critical historical juncture. With the war over and Europe in ruins, many artists and much of the art market had migrated to New York, which managed to become at once a center of the avant-garde and (perhaps not coincidentally) a major site of the advertising-

and media-driven postwar economy. Like the book itself, both of these facets—art and advertising—involved a Janus-faced outlook toward their present moment; much of the avant-garde work in literature and the arts continued and in a sense perfected currents already well established before the war, but it also represented the evolutionary edge of aesthetic production. The city's consumer culture likewise reflected a traditional and characteristically American hucksterism crossed with what would later become an economy substantially divorced from physical production.

It is in this environment that we find the novel's protagonist Wyatt Gwyon, a polemically anti-avant-garde painter who seeks to reproduce the work of the Northern Renaissance masters. *Reproduce* is the key term, of course; Wyatt is a forger, working in concert with an art critic, Basil Valentine, and a dealer-financier named Recktall Brown to create paintings that can be sold in the market as previously undiscovered works by Memling, van der Goes, Bouts, and others. But he is also an artistic purest who believes that he can recreate and extend the body of fifteenth-century art with which he interacts by understanding and reproducing, like Pierre Menard in Borges's story, the conditions under which its creators worked. Wyatt is suspicious of innovation, arguing on more than one occasion that novelty is the refuge of those who are unable to produce "correct" work, the properties of which have long been clear to the masters. Unsurprisingly, Wyatt proves difficult for Valentine and Brown to control, but by the time he turns against their mutual fraud, it is impossible to undo its success; the community of critics has been taken in and they are even less willing to acknowledge their mistakes than they were to make them in the first place. Disgusted and possessing an increasingly tenuous grasp on his sanity, Wyatt abandons his life in New York, including his semi-estranged wife, Esther, and settles in Spain, where he takes the name *Stephen* (or *Stephan*) *Asche* and retreats to a monastery, "restoring" paintings by scraping them down to bare canvas and vowing to live "simply" and "deliberately."

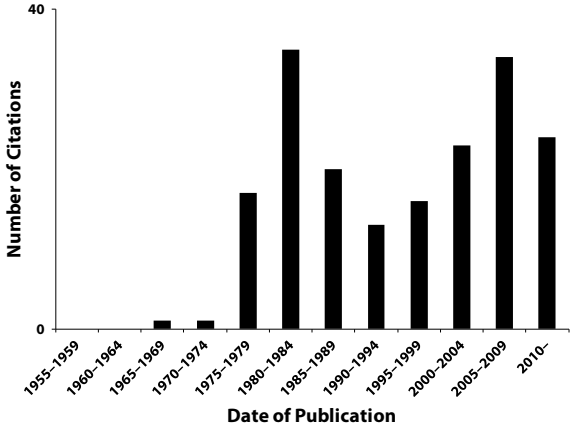
Frequently intersecting with Wyatt's story are several related plots also dealing with forgery in one form or another. Frank Sinisterra, a counterfeiter of currency who appears to share Wyatt's concern for an ethos of authenticity within forgery, is responsible for Wyatt's mother's death at the beginning of the novel when he disguises himself as a ship's surgeon while fleeing the police, and he later mistakenly passes a large sum of forged money to Otto, an aspiring writer who models himself unsuccessfully on Wyatt's

aesthetic ideals. Late in the novel, Sinisterra meets Wyatt in Spain, where he discusses with him the possibility of forging a mummy for sale. Otto, in turn, is a copy of Wyatt, whom he idolizes but whose talent he cannot match; Gordon, the hero of Otto's unfinished drama *The Vanity of Time* (a title borrowed from one of Wyatt's father's sermons), is an imagined amalgamation of traits and views gleaned from Wyatt, Valentine, and others in their circle. When Otto eventually abandons New York and passes himself off as Gordon, his own fictional creation, he is at least four levels of simulation removed from the Flemish masters on whom Wyatt modeled himself.

Inseparable from the questions of legitimacy raised by the central action of the novel are issues of religious conviction played out in the lives of several characters. Wyatt is motivated in part by a belief that the painters he emulates "worked in the sight of God" and that this fact accounted for the clarity and distinction of their art, though Valentine at one point argues scornfully against this "pious cult of the Middle Ages." Like several of Thomas Pynchon's later characters, Wyatt, who contemplated a religious career before settling on an artistic one, is descended from a line of preachers and is at least peripherally concerned with the doctrine of election and preterition. Stanley, a potential alternate to Wyatt as the novel's aesthetic protagonist, is a composer and earnest Catholic working on what in another era "would have been a Requiem Mass." He is killed when the church in which he plays his work collapses on his head, but he, or his music, or the falling church itself is said to "soar in atonement," and Stanley remains one of the novel's least ambiguously sympathetic characters. Esme, Wyatt's drug-addled sometime muse and model, is selected to play the Blessed Virgin Mary in a planned television production of Mary's life that is later changed to an adaptation of the *Commedia*, but she dies of an infection caught by kissing the foot of a religious statue. Several characters are driven insane by their religious conviction, including Wyatt's father—who sacrifices a bull in a Mithraic ceremony before he is committed to an asylum—and the promising but unproven artist Anselm, who castrates himself in a subway bathroom following a cocktail-party argument about religion with Stanley. Finally, the literary agent Agnes Deigh is alternately attracted by Stanley's devotion and repelled by his asceticism. In each of these cases, religion functions as a real or projected ground of genuine belief, but no character is able to maintain either a straightforward embrace or rejection of it without falling into absurdity.[1]

The initial critical reception of Gaddis's novel was mixed at best and, when not simply baffled, frequently hostile. Among the fifty-five contemporary reviews, a small handful were positive, about an equal number were openly negative, and the large remainder were carefully ambiguous, often expressing a personal dislike for the book but leaving open the possibility that it (or its author) might be important in a sense not yet discovered.[2] Most of the initial print run was apparently remaindered, and despite a brief uptick in 1962 when Meridian released a corrected paperback edition and Harcourt, Brace reissued (uncorrected) the 1955 hardcover, *The Recognitions* sold few copies and received almost no critical attention until the mid-seventies, when Gaddis won the National Book Award for *J R* and articles on his work began to appear in scholarly journals. Steven Moore's *Reader's Guide* to the novel was published in 1982, as was a special issue of the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* devoted in part to Gaddis's work; these were followed in 1984 by Moore and Kuehl's volume collecting new and recent essays on the two novels then available. The first book-length studies appeared only at the end of the decade—Moore's short *William Gaddis* was the first, in 1989—and have followed at the rate of one every few years since.

This brief history of the novel's reception is important for two reasons. First, it suggests the difficulty of any attempt to argue that Gaddis's novel profoundly influenced the course of American fiction during the fifties and sixties. "Influence" is of course a notoriously slippery problem, and the fact that *The Recognitions* sold poorly and was widely neglected by critics cannot foreclose the possibility that it enjoyed much greater success in small but culturally significant circles (of fellow authors, for example). Nevertheless, the presumption must be against its widespread direct effect on contemporary literary production before the mid-seventies or later, and the argument that follows makes no serious attempt to reverse this assumption, preferring instead to read the book symptomatically as an indication of the logics and impasses of its situation. The second and more immediate reason to take this history of reception into consideration is that it may help to explain a tendency in the existing critical literature to read Gaddis's novel as if it were a piece of full-blown postmodern fiction or, alternatively and more rarely, of high modernism in the mold of Joyce. I will have more to say about specific instances below, but it may be helpful to bear in mind that although the novel itself is a product of the forties and fifties, its "discovery" and interpretation were carried out almost exclusively in the eighties and nineties,



MLA bibliography citations for subject keyword "William Gaddis" by date of publication. Excludes republished items. By the author.

well past the transitional moment I am working to understand. The dramatic increase in the volume of academic criticism devoted to Gaddis after 1975 is illustrated in the figure above, which plots the number of MLA bibliography citations for the subject keyword "William Gaddis" as a function of their year of publication.[3]

Confronting Modernism

It has long been clear to readers of *The Recognitions*—including those who ultimately have incorporated it into a narrative of cultural continuity—that the novel, like many of those published during the early postwar boom, occupies an ambivalent position with respect to literary modernism. The book makes obvious use of modernist devices and problems, but it seems to be built around a crisis in their underlying assumptions and to be devoted to illustrating modernism's unsuitability as a cultural dominant under the social and artistic conditions of the time. Thus we find in *The Recognitions* a significant inventory of concerns and techniques tied to the earlier period, almost all of which are undermined both in their specific individual functions and in their collective coherence as elements of a unifiable aesthetic ideology—in short, a pile of broken approaches to cultural representation. Examples include the novel's pervasive conflation of art and art markets (contra Pound's *usura* canto, for instance), the bankruptcy of any cultural elite conceived along aesthetic lines, the sterility of a teleological valuation

of novelty (Pound again, along with Marinetti, Wyndham Lewis, Stein, etc.), the subversion of stream-of-consciousness narrative as developed by Faulkner and Woolf, the increasing unreliability of Eliot's or Joyce's writerly intertextuality, and the persistent conflation of minimalism and encyclopedism (running together Hemingway and William Carlos Williams, on one hand, and Proust and Dos Passos, on the other).

The result is a work that shows the once-defamiliarizing techniques of canonical modernist texts from Joyce and Stein to Faulkner and Eliot as codified and denumerable, even when they no longer work especially well. In so doing, it suggests that those texts indeed function (or once functioned) paradigmatically, that is, they could be appropriated, applied, and potentially extended in conservatively recognizable ways in new contexts. There is of course nothing inherently suspicious about such a capacity for stability, which is the basis of language in general and of aesthetic genealogy or periodization in particular, but its ready identification posed a potentially important problem for a modernist aesthetic that was based largely on the discovery that the realism it rejected was the culmination of a long process of technical development. Modernism's great insight—in many ways its central principle—was that the world could and should be more fruitfully explored by rejecting the established techniques of literary realism, which presented not the world itself but a decisively ideological version of it, as bourgeois, rationally ordered, composed of knowable and exchangeable parts, and so on (think, for instance, of the distance between Joyce's sprawlingly internalized Dublin and George Eliot's publicly ordered Middlemarch, or Howells's legibly stratified Boston and Faulkner's palimpsestic Yoknapatawpha). By the 1950s, it would seem, the same was true of modernism itself.

It should come as no surprise, however, that the novel's (and its contemporary cultural field's) recognition of this crisis does not in itself produce a coherent alternative formula for aesthetic practice. To take an example from a different area, the failures of Newtonian mechanics were not overcome by a more careful or rigorous application of Newton's laws, but instead by a new approach to solving the problems that had been raised—hence suggested as the key sites of a new physics—by the best available application of existing paradigms and practices. The task in the literary and scientific cases alike, if the event of a revolutionary reconfiguration is to take place, is to provide an understanding of why the problems at hand are central to the field and to supply the basis for a new mapping between them. Considered together, the

inescapability of existing structures, whether aesthetic or scientific, and the apparently contradictory requirement that revolutionary change effect a break with those forms present a difficult problem.

If a book written in the late nineteen forties and early fifties is necessarily dependent on existing modernist techniques, if it pursues them to their breaking point and yet the resulting demonstration of their unsuitability does not in itself lead to a new aesthetic regime, how can that book—or any book—suggest a compelling alternative to modernism? Part of the answer is that of course it cannot; books may be actors (or *actants*) of the Latourian type in a complex social situation involving human and nonhuman agents, but they are certainly not alone in that position, and so it cannot be said that they do anything at all on their own.[4] What a book can do, and what *The Recognitions* in fact does, is to redeploy an existing technical repertoire or vocabulary—including stream-of consciousness narration and structural fragmentation, as well as rhetorics of progress and anticommercialism, for example—to suggest, within a determinate context, the possibility that its elements might be used differently and that they might relate to one another in new ways. This kind of repurposing is nothing other than the metaphorical use of terms that had functioned literally; if it is extended and systematic, it is allegory.

Allegory is one of the principal methods organizing the otherwise haphazard accumulation of techniques and critiques that make up much of the literal content of Gaddis's novel. This is true in two senses or on two levels, a doubling we should expect to characterize works that respond to the collapse of a literary paradigm. In the first, the text is "conventionally" allegorical, that is, it develops a second story in addition to, but resting on, its basic narrative line. Specifically, *The Recognitions* describes American culture of the late forties and early fifties through a series of characters and situations that function synecdochically and metaphorically as figures for elements of that culture that are not presented directly. This is an approach characteristic of the period; the same is true of *Invisible Man*, for instance, which presents its significant investments in Cold War politics and racial identity alike through an individual bildungsroman, or of Doris Lessing's symbolic division of Anna Wulf into her four constituent notebooks in *The Golden Notebook*. Cultural or national allegory is even more prominent in such other midcentury monuments as *On the Road* and *Lolita*. It is this sense that is expected to characterize transitional or crisis moments generally, since it is a devel-

opment out of the instability of their existing interpretive schemata, which cannot but be used in ways foreign to their previously established meanings.

The second allegorical sense is proper to transitional texts like Gaddis's that confront the erosion of a literary paradigm; because the crisis they treat is in the domain of literature itself and of its signifying processes and because they respond to it (necessarily) allegorically, these works also allegorize the crisis of representation that they create and to which they respond. While any shift in paradigm entails a fundamental uncertainty concerning the objects in its field, changes in literary paradigm have as their object the problem of representation itself (since the establishment and continuation of a more or less stable mode of representation is the function of a literary paradigm), hence they necessarily treat that change, however indirectly, in any representation on which they settle.[5]

In its first allegorical version, *The Recognitions* produces a complicated account of postwar consumer culture and the logics thereof. It is probably necessary to clarify at the outset that this is indeed an allegorical reading of the novel. Despite its obvious interest in (and relevance to) problems of economic and mass cultural production, consumption, and regulation, very little of any broadly based depiction of such issues appears in the text. Absent are the panoramic views of Stephen Crane or Dos Passos, as is Faulkner's more or less directly—if difficultly—figured Mississippi. Instead we find the story of an artist and forger who attempts to repeat what he imagines to have been an ideal situation of aesthetic production and religious belief five centuries earlier. Nearly all of the other principal characters are artists, artistic hangers-on, or deal in the business of art. Its settings are Greenwich Village; scattered, often fictional sites in Europe; and an unnamed and lightly described New England town dominated by Wyatt's increasingly insane father. The events of the plot are minimal despite the book's spine-bending length: a series of character-based, dialogue-driven encounters and party scenes; Wyatt's uneasy work for and collaboration with Brown and Valentine, followed by his repudiation of forgery (and the worldview that enabled it); the various artistic and artistically mediated endeavors—most ending in failure of one sort or another—of the myriad other characters. The narrative itself relies heavily but far from exclusively on spoken dialogue and on a kind of loosely coherent, many-charactered chatter that Joseph McElroy has called networked discourse.[6] Its form might reasonably be described as experimental and has often been called difficult by reviewers in the popular press, but

while its aim is certainly not to create the illusion of narrative transparency, it is far from unreadable even in its most challenging passages.

In short, the book's central features have little to do with a literal rendering of what we would recognize—then or now—as typical or representative American mass cultural experiences and situations, nor does its style resemble closely that of any other major American novel. If the book nevertheless reflects on characteristic aspects of American culture, it must do so indirectly and figuratively by making it possible to read Wyatt's quest and its related phenomena as indicative of them. In its second allegorical version, the novel tells the story of its own necessary failure to represent directly the material that constitutes the tenor of the first allegory—it provides, in effect, an allegorical account of the allegorical response to a collapsing paradigm.

The Cultural Allegory

The first allegory—of a consumer-driven, economically focused culture that rose to particular imaginative prominence after World War II—rests on the synecdochical and metaphorical relationship between the economy of aesthetic ideas and individual human relationships depicted in the novel and the economy of national material production. This reading relies primarily on an extensive personification allegory in which the central figures occupy positions that can be individually identified as coherent aspects of the larger cultural situation to which they belong. When these figures are taken together, the novel thus presents an extended account of the functions and interactions characterizing that situation without depicting it directly.

Reproduction and Authenticity

The would-be playwright Otto Pivner, often treated as a minor parodic character, provides a suitable starting point for this reading in two respects. He embodies on several levels the conflation of consumption and production that the novel posits as characteristic of postwar capital, and he serves (along with the counterfeiter Frank Sinisterra) as a figure for the proliferation of simulacra that Gaddis associates with his moment. In each case, what is at stake is the valuation—and ultimately the possibility—of authenticity; if the proper questions concerning Otto's art inquire into its production—its origins (on what experiences is it based? does it represent them faithfully?) and its relationship to Otto's sources (are the experiences it purports to represent proper to the artist himself?)—then the modernist

concern for authenticity inherited from the Romantics remains firmly intact. Certainly there are suggestions in the novel that at least the second of these is indeed the condition on which aesthetic production is to be evaluated. Otto's play is rejected as a plagiarism and Sinisterra's bills are eventually recognized as fakes; they are inauthentic because they copy that which belongs in one sense or another to someone else. The first set of questions, however, may be the more important one, and it is by no means clear that these questions are equally central to the criticisms offered by Max, Agnes Deigh, Recktall Brown, and others in their circle. For Otto, this means that although he is suspected of having counterfeited the opinions and experiences described in his *Vanity of Time*, none of the critics who dismiss it do so on what would seem to be the compelling basis that the play is *bad*, being a loosely assembled collection of half-understood aphorisms (one of Otto's notes concerning a maxim Wyatt has offered reads "Gd crs as mch fr mmnt as fr hr—wht mean?" [131], to say nothing of the "solids of Uccello" and wholly conventional plot contrivances (the nonspecific South American revolution, for example), but instead on the ground that the mess he has created is not his own. Authenticity in the first sense, of enlightening experience made available for public consumption through literary representation, does not seem to be an overriding factor in assessing the merit of then-contemporary art.[7]

Sinisterra's forgeries support the same point in a different context. As Steven Moore first argued, *The Recognitions* makes widespread use of alchemical metaphors, particularly concerning the status of gold not simply as an object of value but also as a figure for purity or redemption.[8] To cite only the most straightforward example, Wyatt's relief on finding that the *Seven Deadly Sins* table he copied was (apparently) an original ("'Thank God there was the gold to forge!" [689]) is based less on the historical provenance of a particular piece—his own project, after all, is to create new, yet authentic, Renaissance works in the twentieth century—than it is on the possibility of recognizing and reproducing what he imagines to be the gold of a pure, spiritually connected mode of aesthetic production. In comparison, Sinisterra's counterfeit bills are forgeries twice over: not only do they confuse gold's function as a store of value with the symbolic weight Wyatt and the alchemists perceive in it, but they also substitute paper currency in its place as the proper repository of value. It is this double inauthenticity that is of greatest interest here because it helps to establish the way in which Otto and Sinisterra alike serve as figures of simulation without basis, that is, of the function of

simulacra. This is important not so much because it presages a later Baudrillardian argument concerning the constitutive difficulties of symbolic and historical reference but because of the way in which it figures the very possibility of such a point. What links Otto and Sinisterra, their shared error and transgression in the eyes of their contemporaries, is that they each conflate consumption with production. In Otto's case, the result is his eventual disappearance into his own fictional creation (see *Recognitions* §III.1), a consumption of his product that is itself largely a record of Otto's imperfect consumption of Wyatt's production. Comical or obscurantist as this sounds, it demonstrates that neither Otto nor his play is straightforwardly either artist or art, producer or product, at least as those terms are used by the critical and social establishment with which he interacts. In Sinisterra's case, the analogous ambiguity turns on his substitution of the symbol or product of value in place of its object cause, namely, the work of art. Like Otto, who reproduces talk about art in place of art itself, Sinisterra functions as if he has taken Wyatt's alchemical metaphor literally, pleased as he is to create pictures of gold (or more precisely, pictures of pictures of gold, assuming paper currency acts as the first mimetic displacement) rather than gold itself.

Our immediate objection that the split on which these confusions are founded is an artificial one—that consumption and production, like artist and art or currency and value, are not merely inseparable but are finally indistinguishable in both the cultural and economic senses—is a fine but anachronistic one with respect to the American fifties and to *The Recognitions*. In Gaddis's novel the point is precisely that these terms are presented (even if often derisively) as central categories of classification and evaluation (compare J. D. Salinger's entirely earnest use of the same dichotomy of authenticity) and that a large part of what is at stake in the novel is the process by which such indistinguishability might later be established. What the novel has done is to imagine a situation in which these dichotomies have begun to break down but in which their terms remain the operative ones through which to articulate a new framework for aesthetic valuation. Otto and Sinisterra are useful in this regard not because they succeed in presenting such an alternative, or even because they frame the problem clearly—they do neither, and it is not clear that this could be otherwise, given the circumstances—but because they enact the contradiction characteristic of their situation and suffer under its consequences. Their personification of the logic of the simulacrum

positions them in turn as elements of the novel's larger allegory concerning postwar mass culture, and it is this allegory that helps to form the basis or imaginative ground of our own conclusions concerning the final indiscernibility of the terms in question, that is, to abandon authenticity and inauthenticity as definitive measures of aesthetic (or economic) value.

Commerce

Several of the novel's other characters can be treated more quickly. Recktall Brown, for instance, serves as a relatively straightforward figure for what we might call the normalization or realization of commerce. Brown's is a position marginalized in serious fiction after the naturalist critiques of Norris and Dreiser (modernism leaning away from both direct accounts of business and from personification in service of economic critique) but more common a decade or two later (to comic effect in Barth, much more darkly in Ellis's *American Psycho*, and fully central in Gaddis's own *J R*). Unlike the collector Basil Valentine, an aesthete whose embrace of the art market remains ambiguous or conflicted because he can still understand it as the betrayal of another order, Brown is wholly subject to the logic of the market. Nowhere is this clearer than in the discussion that culminates in Valentine's suggestion that Wyatt produce a forgery of Hubert van Eyck.[9] There, Valentine provides Wyatt with a survey of Brown's business interests (chalk toothpaste; laxatives; cleaning fluid sold in small quantities at a hundredfold markup; a breakfast cereal "that gave people spasms of the colon"; a menstrual product, "such a delicate necessity that the shame and secrecy involved make it possible to sell it at some absurd price"), including a proposed "novel factory" to mass-produce popular fiction directed by the judgments of a "public opinion board" (243). Valentine recalls that he laughed when the arrangement was described to him, but concedes that "it's not so funny in his [Brown's] hands," to which Wyatt rejoins "no . . . nothing is funny in his hands. Everything becomes very . . . real" (243).[10] Hoping to assuage Wyatt's misgivings about Brown's vulgarity and cupidity, Valentine councils him not to "concern [himself] with [Brown], with his explanations of reality." "But that's what's so strange," Wyatt responds; "it makes so much sense at first, and then if you listen, you. . . . Yes, he understands reality." Valentine, however, is quick to disagree, insisting that Brown "does not understand reality [. . .] Recktall Brown is reality, [. . .]—a very different thing" (244).

What is important in this exchange is not so much Valentine's assessment, with which we are inclined to agree, of Brown's function as a type or principle of reality, but instead both the ease and the mechanism by which Wyatt approaches it. That art should respond to market forces "makes so much sense at first" because it is a relationship homologous to the idealized Romantic-modern one Wyatt posits between religious conviction and aesthetic production, namely, that there exists first an understanding on the part of the artist (or businessman) concerning the necessary though concealed features of the world and then a subsequent application of that understanding to a material problem at hand.[11] The difference between Wyatt's and Brown's positions is thus conceptually minimal in spite of their apparent antagonism; both profess to have discovered and understood the truth of their situation and to have accommodated their conduct and production to it. Valentine, by contrast, rejects what he insists is the mistaken assurance of both men that reality is a matter of comprehension, suggesting instead that action (and the belief on which action is founded) is the term proper to it. In Brown's case, the implication is that his convictions and their elaboration can be identified with the larger situation in which he exists (of which he *is* the reality) and for which he thus serves as both a synecdochical and a metonymic figure.[12] While this is certainly not Wyatt's professed relationship to his own production (nor, of course, is it Brown's to his), which is a matter of understanding (expressed through the text's recurring references to "recognition" in several forms), it is nevertheless a plausible account of his practice. Unless we are very much mistaken to read Wyatt as deluded in his hagiographic account of the painters he imitates, we must conclude that the material success of his forgeries results not from his understanding of the artists in question or of the world in which they lived but from his commitment to—and skill in—reënacting their techniques.

Where Brown thus provides a figure for the realization-as-routinization of commerce, for its establishment as the simply given condition of action in the contemporary situation, Valentine functions as the bearer of a potential continuity between this order and the Renaissance configuration on which Wyatt builds his practice. In one of the novel's central exchanges, which takes place literally over Brown's dead body and immediately following Valentine's ambiguously sexual offer to collaborate with Wyatt in continuing his forgeries, Valentine sneers at the distinctions Wyatt has drawn between Brown's world and the Northern Renaissance:

> —You and your work, your precious work, your precious van der Goes, your precious van Eyck, your precious not van Eyck but what I want! And your precious Chancellor Rolin, look at him [Brown] there, look at him. Yes, why didn't you paint him into a Virgin and Child and Donor? Do you think it's any different now? That that fat-faced Chancellor Rolin wasn't just like him? Yes, swear to me by all that's ugly! Valentine hissed, and got breath.—Vulgarity, cupidity, and power. Is that what frightens you? Is that all you see around you, and you think it was any different then? Flanders in the fifteenth century, do you think it was all like the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb? [. . .] And your precious van Eyck, do you think he didn't live up to his neck in a loud vulgar court? In a world where everything was done for the same reasons everything's done now? for vanity and avarice and lust? [. . .]
>
> —[. . .] Fear, fear, pessimism and fear and depression everywhere, the way it is today, that's why your pictures are so cluttered with detail, this terror of emptiness, this absolute terror of space. Because maybe God isn't watching. Maybe he doesn't see. Oh, this pious cult of the Middle Ages! Is there a moment of faith in any of their work, in one centimeter of canvas? or is it vanity and fear, the same decadence that surrounds us now. (689–90)

I have quoted at length from Valentine's extended speech, which consumes nearly two of *The Recognitions*' densely set pages, in order to emphasize the inescapable directness of its critique (it is neither a passing remark nor, as is often the case elsewhere in the novel, a metaphorical reading of a different object) as well as the formal qualities that echo and support its polemical conclusion. Concerning the content of the harangue, its most striking feature is the similarity Valentine perceives between corruption in late medieval Europe and contemporary New York; the "vulgarity, cupidity, and power" that Brown embodied for Wyatt essentially resemble, on Valentine's view, the empty piety of Chancellor Rolin that van Eyck was willing and able not just to set aside in pursuit of a commission but to abet actively through his work.

Significantly, the period Wyatt reveres—known alternately as the late Middle Ages or the Northern Renaissance, and covering little more than half of the fifteenth century—was itself one that occupies a place of transition between two much more durable and firmly established eras: the Middle Ages proper and early modernity (or simply modernity, full stop). Like the postwar United States, fifteenth-century Flanders was the burgeoning commercial capital of its time and was similarly characterized by a crisis of confidence in

its existing artistic and cultural institutions. Valentine uses this characterization and its purported effects to create a narrative of continuity between the two periods, but his emphasis on pessimism and decadence has obvious limitations in both cases. Specifically, it holds only with respect to each period's previously existing order, the one in crisis, rather than to the newer emerging alternative, which can scarcely appear in decline, at least on its own terms, even before its adequate articulation.[13] This has two primary effects with respect to the relationship between Valentine and Wyatt: first, it aligns Valentine with the older order, even if only in the process of identifying its crisis or, more interestingly, positing its overthrow as a perpetually recurring (or forever deferred) process; and second, it casts Wyatt's recuperative project as decisively retrograde rather than utopian or progressive, because the ideal his undertaking supports (of purity, revealed truth, etc.) is thus shown to be the necessary construction of any threatened or failing system of order. It thus also functions as a critique of Wyatt's fundamentally conservative mythologization of the Northern Renaissance and reinforces the alignment of *myth* itself with the ideological creation of an idyllic past as an alternative to the fallen present (see chapter 2).

This vision of continuity through repetition is reinforced by the rhetoric of Valentine's speech, which makes heavy use of recurring words and structures. So, for instance, not only does the adjective "precious" appear seven times in the full passage (along with the phrases "by all that's ugly" and "being looked at by God," each four times), but the triptych "vulgarity, cupidity, and power" finds its echo in "pessimism and fear and depression," "vanity and avarice and lust," and the three painters van der Goes, van Eyck, and Bouts. Likewise, the questions Valentine asks—twenty-seven in all, each rhetorical and in support of the same argument—take on an incantatory tone, following often one after another without expository interruption and as if they were entirely (as opposed to only nearly) interchangeable. The effect on the whole is to enact the repetition and continuity the argument describes and thus to extend further Valentine's function as a figure of literal (because actually repeating) and metaphorical (because demonstrating the abstract structures and styles of repetition) connection between the past and the present. Looking elsewhere in the text, we might also point to Valentine's compulsive behaviors—his hand-washing, for instance, or his aversion to dirt—and to his strangely retrograde politics as further indications of this role.

Progress and the Sublime

Two of the novel's prominent women present sharp contrasts to any of the men examined thus far. Moore has compared Wyatt's wife, Esther, to Valentine, arguing that they are "aligned with reason and analysis" (*William Gaddis* 51). The observation that Esther is identified with reason and a rationalizing thrust of modernity is correct, but it is less clear that she functions as Valentine's feminine double. Esther's tastes and interests are largely contemporary, almost excessively so, whereas Valentine's are backward-looking; his motif is repetition, hers is rapid exposition (compare their introductions, hers in strikingly Jamesian terms [78–79], his in Brown's company and involving the first in a series of characteristically obscure allusions to Wyatt's forged *Seven Deadly Sins* [226–28]); and her pragmatism is of a decidedly less cynical cast than is Valentine's. In sum, where Valentine links modernity to the Renaissance by seeing them as either statically continuous or straightforwardly repetitive in their corruption and decay, Esther's version of modernity is strictly progressivist; the present age is for her not just different from but actively better than the past because it has eliminated many of the dogmatic errors that formerly held sway. Esther thus presents an embrace of modernity that Wyatt steadfastly refuses, even when he finally turns away from his ideological nostalgia for the Northern Renaissance. Given her orientation, it is no surprise to find that she and Wyatt are ill paired, and their marriage—never shown or explained in detail—disintegrates largely unremarked over the course of the narrative. The arrangement is similar with respect to the novel itself, where we might understand Esther as a figure for the empirically oriented new realist novel, a path that in form and content alike the *The Recognitions* less rejects than simply ignores.

Esme, Wyatt's model and sometime muse, functions much differently. Associated with creativity, maternity, and divinity, but also with madness and death, hers is the character that most directly embodies the sublime impulse Wyatt claims for his artistic project and that—in a sharply different register—characterizes the awe and confusion associated in the novel with the collapsing modernist and prewar orders. This point is developed first through the perpetually (and, the novel suggests, constitutively) unfinished painting of Wyatt's mother, Camilla, whom Esme is said to resemble. An exchange with Esme while he is preparing to damage his *Death of the Virgin* causes Wyatt to resume work on the portrait, which he had abandoned years earlier, but he leaves off again immediately after their encounter opens the

possibility of a sexual connection between them (274–75). Given the context conflating Esme with Camilla ("It's my picture! You're making a picture of me!" Esme exclaims when she first sees the portrait) and with the Virgin Mary, it is easy enough to read Wyatt's rejection of Esme as a repudiation of his incestuous attraction to his mother's sainted persona. More broadly, the incident is characteristic of Gaddis's treatment of both perfection and completion, which, like a fully articulated alternative to modernist practice, the novel holds no closer than arm's length. Wyatt cannot finish Camilla's portrait because to do so would be to make finite and concrete the abstract set of possibilities (primarily concerning purity—immediately sexual, but symbolically and more importantly socio-aesthetic, since she, through Esme, is the figure for the idealized objective of Wyatt's art) for which she has been made to stand. Esme's image functions similarly for Otto and Anselm, each of whom suffers a debilitatingly sublime inability "to contain the whole figure in his apprehension" upon encountering her naked photograph (446, 538–39, 625).

Anselm's response to his experience of Esme's image serves as a figure for the sterility of even the most nuanced application and understanding of art. Rather than attempt to comprehend and to represent this pseudosexual encounter through an act of artistic production—an act of aesthetic sublimation for which he would seem to be supremely qualified, given the breadth of aesthetic knowledge he has previously displayed—Anselm castrates himself, removing his capacity for sexual generation in the same moment he refuses its artistic analogue. His action is a repudiation of individual production, a position that mirrors both Wyatt's final abandonment of art and the composer Stanley's novel-concluding death. Anselm's helplessness or hopelessness in this instance borders on nihilism, and given his position as a knowledgeable and relatively uncorrupted member of the novel's circles of artistic production, it would be difficult not to interpret his act (which is followed by his flight from New York and a series of attacks on his former friends) as an attempt to eliminate the shared Romantic and modern vision of art as a creative personal act that responds to sublimely intense feeling.[14] This is especially true because Anselm—unlike Wyatt and Stanley, both of whom are established artists before their careers are cut short—abandons not an existing artistic practice (or a procreative one, for that matter) but instead the possibility of any aesthetic production past, present, or future. This radical withdrawal from an artistic response to unsettling social experience—

akin to that depicted by Beckett or, much later, Coetzee—is thus one alternative that the novel portrays as available in the absence of a satisfactory modernist hegemony.

But to return to Esme: In addition to serving as an occasion for sublime experience, Esme is also capable of acting as its subject. Her automatic production of Rilke's first *Duino* elegy (277) involves a fear and an incapacity analogous to Wyatt's, Otto's, and Anselm's, both in the first instance of her terror when faced with the blank page and subsequently in her poetic or artistic subjectivity overcome by the force of Rilke's words, which externalize exactly the threat of (subjective) death at the hands of a "stronger existence" that imperils Esme herself as she produces (or reproduces) them.[15] Esme's sublimity calls attention to the fragility of the Romantic conception of the individual subject as the great soul or sensitive conduit of artistically revealed truth that underlies readings of *The Recognitions* (like Moore's or Knight's) which understand Wyatt's art as a fully articulated alternative to modernity's perceived debasement. If the response in the novel to sublime experience, which entails understanding beyond intuition and conventional judgment—and this is exactly the claim Wyatt makes for his art—is speechlessness, incompletion, and castration, it is hard to see how the artist is uniquely capable of conveying this source experience through the work of art. Nevertheless, Esme does serve as a figure for the possibility of sublime experience itself—however imperfectly conveyed and even if its mechanics and consequences differ significantly from those claimed by a recuperative reading of Romanticism and Gaddis alike—and it may be true that, like her, the novel can at best convey the inadequacy of its own response to a contemporary moment it figures as similarly incomprehensible or nontotalizable.

Authenticity and Novelty

Last among the novel's major allegorical figures are the artists Stanley and Wyatt, who engage most directly with the alternatives presented by the other characters in an attempt to produce, like Bunyan's Christian, a properly integrated response to the event at the center of the text. Unlike Christian, of course, they can hardly be said to succeed in their task, but they share with Bunyan's hero the perceived necessity of responding to a crisis in its own terms, in this case by imagining and executing an artistic style or method that can address the newly discernible shortcomings of late modernism.[16]

Concerning Wyatt, many of the major points have been incorporated

into the readings of other figures above. It bears repeating, however, that one of Wyatt's most significant functions is as an illustration of the ideological formation that contributes to the operation of exactly the market he and his work ostensibly critique or reject. What allows him to produce forgeries—sustaining thereby Brown's "inauthentic" or aesthetically and ethically valueless commercial empire, as well as the reality or necessity of the logic underlying it—is nothing other than his professed belief in the authenticity of an imagined earlier artistic mode. Wyatt is thus an ideological figure at two levels, the first Sloterdijkian (he knows very well what he is doing, but nevertheless, he does it), the second Žižekean (he does not know that his social reality itself is structured by a fetishistic fantasy). He knows what he is doing with the forgeries, both as frauds (which remain his own until "corruption enters" [251] at the moment he attaches a false signature) and as "mere" imitations, but all the same, he does it.[17] If this were all, however, Wyatt would be a compromised and hypocritical artist, but not an exceptional one, save perhaps in the degree of his talent. Instead it is his belief in authenticity itself that is the significant ideological function of his character. Tellingly, it is exactly this belief that spares him from self-conviction and allows him to work within Brown's commercial scheme. Wyatt's belief in authenticity is an instance of ideological fantasy; the problem is not that his art is inauthentic but that the very idea of artistic authenticity is the fantasy that allows his art to function as a (mere) commodity. This is true with respect to Wyatt himself, since his conviction that he "works in the sight of God," as did the Flemish masters, is what justifies his forgeries as something other than fraudulent goods (thereby allowing him to see his work as distinct from Brown's other, debased businesses), and with respect to the market in which those forgeries circulate, since their value rests entirely on the perceived relevance of their mistakenly "authentic" provenance.

This concern for authenticity leaves Wyatt's final rejection of art ambiguous. If what he abandons in his flight from New York and his eventual withdrawal from society altogether is the idea of authenticity, having realized that its lone apparent bastion in art had become (if it had not always been) illusory, this conclusion represents a marked shift away from his previously professed position and from the ideological system it enabled. Such a reading is supported most clearly in the closing section devoted to Wyatt's time at the Real Monasterio (the same that had sheltered his father decades earlier; see §§I.1 and III.5), where his dubious "restoration" work on the mon-

astery's paintings suggests a simple destruction or erasure of art. But there is also evidence in this section to suggest that Wyatt's abandonment of art has less to do with a full departure from the ideal of authenticity than with his disillusionment concerning the ability of art alone to deliver it. After leaving New York, he resolves repeatedly to "simplify," to "live through" the consequences of his previous mistakes, and "to live deliberately" (896, 900). The echoes of Thoreau are unmistakable, and the allusion is a thematically important one. There can be little doubt concerning Thoreau's quest to find a more authentic existence at Walden, and Wyatt's invocation—in his final lines of dialogue in the novel—of one of the most direct statements of that ambition is difficult either to overlook or to construe ironically. Unlike Thoreau, however, neither Wyatt nor Gaddis expands substantially on the details of a life lived deliberately or simply, and these terms remain aspirationally vague rather than meaningfully programmatic in the novel.[18] For this reason, and again in light of Wyatt's madness, it is impossible to conclude with confidence that *The Recognitions* has been building over the previous nine hundred pages toward a latter-day Transcendentalism.

This uncertainty in outcome with respect both to the novel's central character and to its most expansively treated ideas is an important problem, one that helps to explain the prominence of its allegory. Because the concept of authenticity necessarily posits a functioning regime of authorization and validation—a paradigm and the apparatus that grow up around it—it is not surprising that Wyatt's turn away from the Northern masters coincides with his disillusionment concerning the religio-aesthetic ideal he once pursued in his forgeries. The question—for Wyatt and for the reader, given the foregoing allegorical analysis—is then with what, if anything, this broken system of authenticity should be replaced. Wyatt's "simple" and "deliberate" life offers the form but not the content of a solution, a slogan or watchword in light of which to reconfigure his own situation. This returns him at the novel's end to a state very much like the one from which he set out in his critique of modernism, only now having first developed and then rejected a system based on "disciplined nostalgia" for the fifteenth century, which system must now itself be subjected to an analogous process. The difficulty, of course, is that the terms and the shape of the new situation are necessarily unknowable in advance; echoing the conclusion reached in chapter 3, these elements exist in the *futur antérieur*, as what will have been the case at the outset when seen in retrospect from a later stage of the project. Wyatt's

earlier error in embracing the terms of authenticity proper to a previous age was to attempt to subvert this temporal sequence by importing a fully developed system and vocabulary of representation into his own moment, thereby eliminating the process by which new paradigms and modes of authenticity could develop in response to their specific conditions.

Gaddis is careful to avoid making the same mistake. His novel's critique of both modernist literature and contemporary consumer culture lacks any of Wyatt's undisciplined nostalgia, whether for an earlier principle of literary composition or a socio-economic order preexisting mass capital, but it also refuses any simple application of novelty as productive of a fully achieved or articulated alternative. Instead, it analyzes the failures or impasses in question through an allegorical narrative that is and is not about them, thereby enabling the critique to proceed in terms (forgery and simulacra, for instance, or separation and unity) that are comprehensible within the existing situation but are placed under what we might call, with a deliberate nod to Badiou and Lacan, "torsion"—that is, open to and suggestive of the need for redeployment or reinterpretation in a new situation specifically structured by the fact of this difference.

Like Wyatt, Stanley possesses both an aversion to novelty and the sense that the past was superior, in its art and in its conviction, to the present. Unlike Wyatt's (ironically), Stanley's nostalgia might reasonably be called disciplined insofar as he is aware that his work must differ from that produced by the earlier masters he admires (generally the Italians and Germans of the late Renaissance and Baroque, always religiously affiliated). The substance of this difference—both from Wyatt and from his forebears—remains obscure and often ambivalent, but it can be traced in each case to a disagreement concerning the possibility and desirability of completion. Where Wyatt and the old masters alike are seen through most of the novel to value and pursue (and often achieve) finished, "perfected" works, Stanley is largely unable to reach such closure and reluctant to seek it.[19]

The problem for Stanley is that he lacks a satisfactory standard against which to measure perfection in his own case; he admires composers (Bach, Palestrina, Gabrieli, Corelli) who "had touched the origins of design [. . .] with music written for the Church" (322), and he is a professed Catholic himself, but he is acutely aware that the world around him does not share the religious conviction that he believes pervaded earlier centuries, and he cannot attain through his own work the religious ecstasy that seems to have

driven those earlier artists. Lacking an (imagined) consensus concerning the purpose of life and music, but insisting that a similar unanimity must somehow be possible in his own age, Stanley continually laments what he can only see as the imperfection—the cheapness and expendability—of a culture focused on the immediate and material rather than the eternal and transcendent. Unlike Wyatt, Stanley is unwilling to solve this problem by simply renouncing the contemporary moment in favor of an attempt to restore his preferred order, but he is plainly unable to articulate a convincing and successful alternative.

In the absence, then, of a clear and specific goal for his work or of a culture able to evaluate his progress toward such an end, Stanley is left to amass attempted and discarded approaches to it, comparing his work to a palimpsest as he tries repeatedly to "account for this accumulation, to order it." Responding to the suggestion that he declare his composition complete and move on to another, he explains:

> No, that's . . . you see, that's the trouble. . . . It's as though this one thing must contain it all, all in one piece of work, because, well, it's as though finishing it strikes it dead, do you understand? And that's frightening, it's easy enough to understand why, killing the one thing you . . . love. I understand it, and I'll explain it to you, but that, you see, that's what's frightening, and you anticipate that, you feel it all the time you're working and that's why the palimpsests pile up, because you can still make changes and the possibility of perfection is still there, but the first note that goes on the final score is . . . well that's what Nietzsche [meant by "the melancholia of things completed"]. (599)

The link Stanley posits between perfection and accumulative encyclopedism is telling. His work must contain everything in an expansive rather than a schematic sense because he has no schema to substitute for this enumeration, yet his specific enumeration cannot be satisfactory, both because it is necessarily finite and, more importantly, because it lacks a functional principle of inclusion and exclusion (as evinced by Stanley's palimpsestic additions and deletions, none of which is definitive). Like Benjamin's Trauerspielists and most of Kuhn's practitioners of a science in crisis, Stanley creates a work whose end can only be seen as an arbitrary failure to achieve the comprehensive delineation of its object. For this reason, the finished work remains in Stanley's experience a source of melancholia and disappointment, a reminder that in the end "nothing, absolutely nothing, [was] the

way he thought it would be" (955). And although his surviving work is "spoken of, when it is noted, with high regard," it is "seldom played" (956), an indication that whatever significance we may be tempted to attach to its completion, the work has manifestly failed to provide a point of departure for a new musical or artistic order.

Markets, Culture, and Meta-Allegory

Stanley and Wyatt, the characters tasked most directly with responding to the novel's allegorical use of the state of modern art as a figure for the broader culture in which it is embedded, both fail to present in their own work a viable alternative to the schema of aesthetic modernism, a fact that suggests the difficulty of formulating and pursuing a revolutionary paradigm or truth procedure. But their failure ought not to be confused with the novel's work as a whole; not only have several of the other characters discussed above suggested possible avenues to a new artistic order—with obvious figurative implications for their cultural situation—but *The Recognitions* itself extends the response to this set of conditions well beyond the actions of its characters. There are important structural and formal aspects of the text and of the large-scale cultural phenomena it depicts more or less indirectly that supplement and often contradict the story presented through the foregoing personification allegory.

If the characters in *The Recognitions* can be read, through their roles in the artistic coteries of Greenwich Village, as figures for specific elements and tendencies in postwar American culture—for the "reality" of commercial exchange, the normalizing narrative of modernization, a schizophrenic response to the sublime or the absolute, the potential sterility of mass culture, the increasing relevance of the simulacrum, the persistence of several older orders and the impossibility of maintaining a fidelity to them, and so on—the novel's allegorical signification is nevertheless not exhausted. Inseparable from these figures are the mappings between the small, relatively closed community of artists and salient aspects of the sociocultural critique the novel undertakes, as well as the meta-allegorical content in which the text can be read as reflecting on its processes of allegorical signification in response to a specific cultural situation. And unlike the individual characters of the personification allegory—or, to a lesser extent, that narrative taken as a whole—the larger-scale and metafictional aspects of the novel offer a more promising, though still tentative and uncertain, way forward from the collapse of modernism.

Exchanging Culture

The art market that confronts the reader of *The Recognitions* is sprawlingly disorganized, nearly to the point of being unworkable as a forum for valuation and exchange. There is little agreement concerning the merits of new works of art (witness Max's creations or Esme's poems), no effective judgment or validation concerning "new-old" works such as Wyatt's (or Esme's Rilke reproduction), and a trade in older works that is based solely on signatures and scientific or pseudoscientific tests of their materials. By loosely identifying himself and his book with the responses of Wyatt and Stanley—and with those of the less romanticized or heroic Otto, Anselm, Esme, and Valentine—Gaddis extends this representation to the literary field, which he thus depicts as similarly confused in both its forms and its aims. The novel's frequent invocations of advertising, mass media, and widely distributed consumer goods in terms analogous to those used to describe the machinations of the art market (most clearly in Sinisterra's forgeries and Brown and Valentine's commercial schemes, but more mundanely in, for example, the *Necrostyle* and *Cuff* campaigns tied to *The Lives of the Saints* radio program or Stanley's obsession with expendability) likewise suggest an expansion of its critique to encompass the much larger markets of the postwar economy. In all three cases, the novel depicts a marked tension between novelty as a necessary and constitutive engine of market function—the new is valuable in itself, while the old diminishes in value independently of any other factor—and authenticity conceived as the accumulation of historical validation. The claim, in fact, is that true mass markets depend on maintaining exactly this dichotomy, whereby the possibility of a genuine or authentic historical process can be held out as potentially applicable to or transposable onto a new development or product that specifically breaks with it but that nevertheless represents its culmination or perfection. And although, as I argued in the previous section, Wyatt in particular is at times openly critical of this contradiction, it is less clear that the novel as a whole rejects it, especially when we consider the book's form and structure.

As noted at the outset, *The Recognitions* clearly displays a number of high modernism's characteristic traits, among them a penchant for difficult, writerly prose; a concern in its content for the philosophical problems of art, especially as they affect the artist; an often clear separation between high and low culture; and a tendency toward novelty of style and technique. One of the problems faced by the late modern work of art, however, was that

formal and stylistic novelty was itself, by the postwar period, a sort of established style, making modernism a difficult formal regime to reject. One option, of course, would have been to adopt, like Wyatt, a specific older model and to declare a fidelity to it as a more genuine, authentic, or simply useful way of approaching the artistic project however defined (and as Wyatt's case again illustrates, to select a formal model is also to endorse a particular answer concerning art's purpose). *The Recognitions* itself plainly does no such thing; it has obvious debts to certain works, as any book must, but there seems to be no earlier text, system, or aesthetic ideology in imitation of which it is written or to which it advocates a salutary return, nor has any critic claimed to have discovered one.[20]

The two remaining alternatives, between which the novel cannot or does not decide, are to profess exclusively a new mode, that is, to maintain a fidelity to an event within the domain of literature (as did the Romantics after Goethe and Wordsworth and the modernists after Joyce and Eliot, and later, as postmodernism would after Pynchon and Ashbery) or, alternatively, to continue working within the existing literary framework (Beckett's work is perhaps best understood as an exploration of how much was still possible within modernism proper). The question is not one, of course, of absolute rejection or acceptance; a revolution—scientific, political, literary, or otherwise—never abolishes all that preceded it, nor does what Kuhn might have called "normal" science, politics, or art statically preserve the status quo. But those who follow (in the senses both of commitment and of temporal sequence) a revolution can be said meaningfully to inhabit a different world than did those who preceded it. In Gaddis's case, we find the suggestion that another order is possible, but we are stopped short of discovering and acting on the content of such a revelation or declaration because Stanley and Wyatt, who might have offered, in their final responses to an artistic situation linked closely to Gaddis's own, a tenable if figurative alternative formulation, fail to provide one. Second, the novel is only intermittently faithful to its own more radical formal ideas. In some instances, this is attributable to the provisional status of those forms themselves; the tendency to accumulate observations, descriptions, and plot details that characterizes much of the narrative, particularly the three long party scenes, is an encyclopedic technique associated with the literature of crisis, and it is difficult to imagine it as an overriding and enduring compositional principle on which to found a new literary regime. The same might be said for the novel's allegorical structure, which is

pervasive but rarely highlighted and never presented directly (this in a novel not shy about open discussions of art, technique, and philosophy) as a solution to the crisis facing the characters and the literary field alike. This too is unsurprising, given the role of allegory as a transitional form, and while it would be possible to advocate the rise of a newly allegorical era, there is no reason to believe that this would have been an especially fruitful position for subsequent postwar fiction.

More interesting for the course of contemporary cultural production is the novel's tentative deployment of potentially disruptive techniques such as direct discourse without narrative intervention, pastiche and internal repetition, and montage. The text's final inability or unwillingness to elevate one or more of these features to the level of a consistent and pervasive compositional principle, coupled with their entanglement in existing modernist techniques, also recalls the third potential response to the crisis of modernism, namely, the continuation of its existing forms, extending or modifying them as necessary to account for their apparent deficiencies. The exclusive use of a direct discourse almost indistinguishable from stream of consciousness not just as a supplement to but in place of narration is a technique that Gaddis himself perfected in *J R* twenty years after *The Recognitions* was published. In the later book—which contains only a handful of narrative intrusions in its more than seven hundred pages—dialogue usurps the function of narration, a move that has often been taken to suggest the impossibility of strong objectivity in literature (and beyond), as well as to comment on the ideological function of (in this case literal) financial markets by portraying the manipulability of the information on which they rest. But this function for direct discourse works only if it supplants authorial narration much more fully than it does in *The Recognitions*. As things stand, large passages of direct discourse serve primarily to illustrate the difficulty and frequent absurdity of communication. This is a suggestive point, but it is one that Faulkner and Joyce had already made in much the same form decades earlier—to say nothing of previous literary usages typically connected to insanity—and it remains reasonable to interpret its intermittent use in *The Recognitions* as symptomatic of a local problem concerning the specific conditions of the participants rather than as a constitutive feature of language and narrative (as it would come to be understood in the following decades).

Similar points could be made about pastiche, repetition, and montage

(this last an especially modernist-identified cinematic technique), all of which eventually also became central concerns of high postmodernism once they were seen not as anomalous failures of normal signification but instead as its inevitable components. These techniques remain, in *The Recognitions*, primarily figures of craft, and although their presence provides an important counterpoint to the retrograde and conservative tendencies of a number of the novel's characters, their use is never sufficiently pervasive to suggest they are inescapable rather than merely frequent, hence that they are to be embraced as the ordering principles of a new situation rather than overcome as problems in the existing one.

For both these reasons—the lack of a clear articulation of a new praxis and the absence of commitment to its formal innovations—as well as its failure to find a large audience to propagate the advances it did suggest, *The Recognitions* remained (and perhaps remains) in a kind of limbo between the two productive and interpretive regimes that it can now be read retrospectively as an attempt to connect. Given the difficulty of the project and the rarity of revolutionary events (literary or otherwise), this uncertain status is not surprising. All three of the markets or systems of production and exchange with which it deals (fine arts directly, literature and mass markets figuratively) were significantly unsettled at the time of its composition, and each displayed the tension between authenticity and novelty discussed above.[21] *The Recognitions* is limited in the alternatives it presents, but by linking the three domains as characterized by similar difficulties arising from related uncertainties over the sources and maintenance of value (or values), it suggests one of the most important insights into what eventually became postmodernism both as a collection of artistic practices and as a cultural logic.

Allegories of Allegory

The apparent difficulty of expressing this point at the time—and its overt rejection in much of the manifest content of the novel—accounts for the text's reliance on allegory. The first-order mapping that takes place in conventional social allegory, tying individual aspects of the book's narrative to features of the contemporary situation, has been the primary object of the preceding analysis. There also exists in the novel, however, a second-order allegory, one in which the process of allegorical signification itself is the tenor to the first-order vehicle concerning the relationship between markets

and culture. According to this meta-allegory, allegory begins (or began) with the conviction that a truer or more authentic meaning underlies the objects of direct narration and that, with sufficient effort and skill, one might recognize this hidden content, thereby redeeming the base narrative by supplanting it as the end product of a superior reading. Ideally, this allegory would also provide a disciplining system through which to organize even an apparently haphazard or contradictory base narrative; it would, in short, indicate the delimiting principle necessary to allow the text to contain or unify its subject matter. But just as the second story cannot be separated from the first, in *The Recognitions* this claim concerning the true and redemptive function of allegory cannot escape the novel's conclusions regarding the imperfect or arbitrary operations of the market. The implication is that the success or failure of allegory to establish its withheld or more obscurely coded meaning is subject to the same kinds of changes or fluctuations in equivalence of value (which is to say in equivalence of meaning) as are any specialized or local market embedded in a larger system of exchange and the system of exchange itself, which depends inescapably on the continuing but unstable agreement of its participants.

The result is a picture of allegory that finds it tied always to the conditions of its reception and hence that regards as illusory the possibility of any given allegorical narrative to provide the key or definitive solution to the interpretation of its moment of production. But this is certainly not to disqualify allegory as an effective if provisional tool through which to perform just such an interpretation. The claim here is twofold: first, that allegorical interpretation is always a contested or contestable pursuit and thus that allegories and their relevance to a literary or cultural situation are always made rather than found, the result of what Latour would call contests of strength; and second, that the meaning and pertinence of an allegorical text—up to and including the fact of its allegoricalness—are, even after they have been settled for a given moment or audience, unstable over any arbitrarily long duration. Allegories are not, in other words, especially portable. This is particularly relevant to transitional texts like *The Recognitions*, which are most likely to rely on allegory as a necessary component of their response to a crisis of representation. Not only are these texts and their readings frequently contested as vehicles of transformation, but the role they played in past revolutionary events is, on this model, easily obscured as their content and standing shifts markedly over time. While this phenomenon is not unique

to allegory, it is more pronounced in such cases owing both to the number of coherently interacting interpretive moves on which allegory depends and to the tendency of explicitly allegorical readings to be suppressed in critical and professional literature across a broad range of cultural and historical situations, which leads to a relative paucity of direct evidence for the specific allegorical constructions a text may have been given at various points in the history of its reception.

None of these difficulties is impossible to overcome, or rather, the concerns *The Recognitions* raises about the status of its interpretation and the effect it might have on the course of late modernism differ in quantity but not quality from those noted more generally in literary criticism and theory over the years following its publication. Establishing the validity of an allegorical interpretation is, as always, dependent on the strength of the forces brought to bear for and against it. This vocabulary is consciously Latourian, but it is broadly compatible with the account of events and evental subject formation developed in chapter 3, which emphasized the necessity of fidelity on the part of a collective subject not to a particular outcome but to a new way of conceiving the situation at hand. An important factor, then, in any work assessing the role of texts that, unlike Gaddis's, were taken up more widely and immediately as interventions in the same situation (*Waiting for Godot* or *Invisible Man*, say, on one—finally still modernist—hand; *The Golden Notebook* or *Giles, Goat Boy* or *Gravity's Rainbow*, on the other) is to determine both what they imagine or construct as a receiving or interpreting subject of their allegory and the extent to which that abstraction found a social or cultural embodiment at the time. The question concerns what we might call the *subject* of evental literature—who or what is responsible for adopting and working through the implications of the (literary) event, and what role allegorical texts play in shaping this process—and it is the focus of the next two chapters of this book. It is Gaddis's signal contribution to have identified this revolutionary problematic and to have provided a text that allows us both to frame the question and to study a tentative example of it in action. If its subject—the postmodern reader or text—remained obscure at the time, it is certainly no longer so, a development for which *The Recognitions* must thus share a constitutively ambiguous credit.

6

Ellison's Impure Manifesto

I too have become acquainted with ambivalence.

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

It is difficult to imagine a trajectory of early critical reception, for a first novel with literary ambitions, more different from *The Recognitions*' than that of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Where Gaddis and his novel languished in obscurity for two decades, Ellison's book spent four months on the 1952 best-seller list and won the following year's National Book Award for fiction (ahead of Hemingway, Steinbeck, and William Carlos Williams, among others). *Invisible Man* was discussed widely and favorably in the popular, academic, and what might be called the intellectual press, and Ellison immediately became a spokesman for "the Negro," for the American novel, and for the tangled political situation presented by and in the coincidence of those two subjects.[1] That a significant portion of the novel's perceived importance was due to its obvious allegorization of racial consciousness before that phrase was widely understood is clear and ought to be on the record from the outset.

In spite of the attention the book received, much of it aimed explicitly at the task of categorization and genealogy (racial and otherwise), Ellison's novel proved difficult to assimilate to any one literary tradition or school. The incessant comparisons to Richard Wright and *Native Son*—a book with which *Invisible Man* has little in common beyond the race of its protagonist and author and an expression of dissatisfaction with the contemporary social situation—suggested a powerful compulsion to read the novel as an iteration of what was then called "the protest novel."[2] But Ellison's evident interest in and respect for the project of American democracy and Ameri-

canness in general (rare is the interview or comment on his own work that fails to touch on his status as an American writer dealing with American themes and American conditions), as well as his book's classical bildungsroman structure and heavily ambivalent conclusion made it difficult to understand the text as one devoted to the kind of comprehensive negation by which the "protest" genre was known.[3] The protest novel, too, was characterized formally by its naturalism and affinity for social (and socialist) realism, which rendered it by the late forties aesthetically retrograde even as its political project made strongly progressive claims. Given the influence of Wright and other authors of protest fiction (including Ann Petry, William Attaway, Willard Motely, James Farrell, and John Steinbeck), particularly within the African American literary community, during the pre- and immediate postwar period, an explicit embrace of high modernist principles presented a conveniently available strategy for texts that sought to distinguish themselves from the mainstream of existing work. This move was made even more attractive by the political pressures of the early Cold War—which discouraged both the overt socialism of much protest fiction and the Left associations of the proletarian and social realist styles—and by the growing professional institutionalization of modernism itself, which by the time Ellison was writing *Invisible Man* had become (thanks in no small part to the work of the American New Critics) prestigious and widely studied.[4] For exactly these reasons, however, modernism could not present an altogether satisfactory alternative at the time; it belonged, as Ellison's own respectful allusions to the influence of Eliot, Joyce, Faulkner, and Hemingway make clear, to a previous generation, new and challenging, perhaps, to a certain black literary left with which Ellison clearly did not entirely identify, but not disruptive in any larger sense (and indeed already comprehensively coöpted by postwar mass culture, as detailed in chapter 5).

This situation, in which both naturalist and modernist styles—and as much to the point, the antagonism between them—were seen simultaneously to have exhausted themselves as adequate vehicles of American and African American literary expression alike, left Ellison in a difficult position. What had become even at the time an easy and conventional binarism between politics and art, a binarism that continued to shape evaluations of Ellison's work over the next half century and that has only recently been set mostly to the side, already presented a false choice; his task was to articulate

a twofold alternative, an artistically conceived and expressed political subject that could exist outside the conventionally available categories he was to depict in his novel (where they are personified in Bledsoe, Ras, and Jack), as well as a style of literary production that resisted the conventions through which those types found easy expression. The degree of Ellison's success in this project can be measured in part by the extent of his rejection in the text of naturalist and modernist conventions alike, but, like Gaddis three years later, the more compelling and more difficult question concerns Ellison's ability to formulate a cohesive and enduring set of alternative practices.

That *Invisible Man* is not a work of naturalist protest fiction requires little documentation over and above what has been provided by others in evidence of the long-standing critical consensus on the novel's purported modernism.[5] That the book is not simply modernist—as both its admirers and detractors have frequently asserted—is a claim that will plainly require additional support and elaboration. First, we should observe that the political characterization of conventional high modernism as straightforwardly quietist, and thus the conclusion that if *Invisible Man* fails to present a readily identifiable political program it must necessarily be a modernist text, is equally flawed as a description (of either Ellison's text or modernism as a movement) and as a piece of logic. More substantively, the features that have been adduced in support of the novel's inclusion in the body of modernism proper are numerous, but they exhaust neither its formal characteristics nor its plausible interpretations. Thus, although it is correct to say that the text's polyphony, ambiguity of characterization, heavy use of symbol and metaphor, appropriation or redeployment of existing conventions of narrative (the bildungsroman, for example, or the exhortatory oration, or even the naturalist portrait), and its frequently cited "experimental attitude" all serve to qualify *Invisible Man* as a piece of particularly post-Jamesian modernism, they can do so without equivocation only by eliding the role of many of those same features in complicating the extension of modernism itself. The details of this process of autocoöption are described below; here we might note that if it does occur in Ellison's novel, it will provide us with another instance of the formation or isolation of a site—understood once again as the locus of a potential event, although not one that entails any particular event (or any event whatsoever) as its necessary consequence—within an existing situation by elements of that situation itself.

Bildung and Oration

Two lines of development in the novel stand out from, and together largely entail, the others concerning *Invisible Man*'s ambiguous modernity and the novel's status as an evental site with respect to literary late modernism. These are the Invisible Man's ironic or inverted *Bildung* (development, education) and the rhetorical complexity and ambiguity of his public orations. The first of these strands, concerning a version of the protagonist-narrator's education or integration into civil society, has drawn significant critical interest in recent years, thanks in part to its early treatment by Kenneth Burke, a figure now widely cited and recuperated in connection with Ellison. There are two standard ways of reading this aspect of the novel, each of which can be tied to a position on its relationship to modernism. First, one might understand the narrator's successive disillusionments with existing social and political structures as moments or processes or relative enlightenment.[6] On this reading, each of his rejections of an established, available course of life—most significantly, of first the idealized racial uplift through diligent work represented by the College and its Founder myth, and later of the Brotherhood's doctrinaire (and "foreign") prescriptions for inert analysis—is an instance in which he casts off an illusion concerning the nature of the world around him. Cumulatively, they tell the story of progression from ignorance to knowledge, figured literally (if sometimes unconventionally) as a movement from rural to urban space, from community to individuality, and from natural to artificial or technological light. The endpoint of this education or development differs in kind from the process of social integration usually illustrated by classical bildungsromans, but the motivation in each case is similar, namely, to bring the central character to a point at which he is able to function on meaningful terms in the world around him. In this case it is less significant that the narrator has not, at the conclusion of the novel, developed a new course of action (he is in "hibernation," which he claims is a "covert preparation for a more overt action" [13]) than it is that he has established a legitimate (because illusionless) basis upon which to construct any such plan from the "infinite possibilities" (576) of his situation. These possibilities are not, the progressivist reading explains, the delusional fantasies of a beaten man retreating from ineffectual public action into meaningless private reverie, but the necessary precondition of any new intervention, one based not on extending or modifying the failed approaches encountered

previously but on an entirely new course free of the blindnesses that formerly plagued him.

The allegorical relationship between this standard story and a conventional account of modernism's rejection of realism or naturalism is difficult to overlook. Thus, just as the Invisible Man gradually realizes that the forms according to which he has lived—even, and perhaps especially, those that appear to offer him a way up—are ruses designed to "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" (33 and passim), so too are the conventions of realist and naturalist fiction (whether the purported plain speaking of a Dreiser or a Wright or the elaborate technical devices of the well-made Jamesian novel) an active obfuscation of and impediment to the writer's true purpose, which is to understand the artificiality of these techniques so as to overcome their inadequacies. It is less important on this reading to produce any single new mode of representation than it is to realize that every view is partial or perspectival and that every technique is unnatural, and thus to root out the error of confident belief in the possibility of choosing one true path, be it political or aesthetic. If this view is quietist, its defender will maintain that it is so only to the extent that errors practiced in the service of sincere conviction remain erroneous and that we are better served by drawing attention to the possibility, indeed the inevitability, of such mistakes than by persisting in the belief that they are either nonexistent or rare. Better, in other words, a long hibernation or a consciously experimental attitude than a hasty action or a committed perspective. This is nevertheless a potentially teleological and triumphalist account of both the Invisible Man and the modernist novel insofar as it maintains the prospect of amelioration, that is, of a "truer," if not finally true, program of politics or of representation, specifically one to be pursued along the lines the Invisible Man and *Invisible Man* at least implicitly suggest.

The alternative reading, which we might call the regressivist or conservative version for its interpretation of the central character's withdrawal from political life as a retrograde development, finds little reason to regard the narrator's disillusionment or his reaction to it as matters of enlightenment or progress.[7] The critique in this case depends precisely on the lack of conviction that is taken as a virtue in the progressivist reading; as the narrator partially embraces the ideal of malleability represented by Rinehart, the regressivist reader claims, he simultaneously loses his ability to connect

to, interact with, or bring about changes in the situation in which he is embedded. This is made all the more troubling because this situation is plainly teetering on the brink of revolution. The left-critical consensus, whether finding affinity itself with Ras or with the Brotherhood, condemns the Invisible Man's inability to take part in the riot that closes the main body of the text—along with his immediately subsequent and causally related withdrawal from public life altogether—as a failure to intervene in the course of events he helped to create and in which he presumably maintained (or ought to have maintained) an active interest. His inaction is thus seen as a mark of his reluctance to embrace either the possibility of revolutionary change itself or the fact of his responsibility for its development. But a right-oriented critique, taking inspiration perhaps from Bledsoe or Norton, would differ little from this position, except that it would find fault with the same inaction for the opposite reason, namely, that it allows to proceed a near-revolution that might have been more easily contained by the narrator's active involvement, a duty that is incumbent upon him all the more forcefully due to his role in setting the crisis in motion. Fundamentally, the right and left regressivist critics agree that the Invisible Man must act, although they dispute the proper course of his action. Whatever the difficulties or inadequacies of our existing political structures, they argue, these are the terms in which current political debate and action can occur; these terms may well evolve over time, but if they do, it is because figures like Ras, Jack, Bledsoe, Norton, Scofield, and Dupre (the last two are the men who burn their tenement during the riot) modify them from within and in relation to one another, not by the abstract suggestion that the present system is flawed, but by concrete attempts to provide it with new positive content. The narrator's concluding retreat into his "warm hole" is thus both literally and figuratively regressive, a withdrawal not just from any particular politics but from the possibility of politics itself.

In this case, too, the mapping between a reading of the text and a set of broader claims about modernism is easy enough to discern. Like the narrator, the regressivists argue, Ellison's novel and the movement it represents reject any comprehensive social engagement of their own. More importantly and perniciously, however, character and book alike suggest both that such a withdrawal from active (and activist) social participation may be necessary or desirable in its own right and that the techniques that long served to support effective political action (education, party organization, national-

ism, etc.) and socially engaged fiction (including realist narration, proletarian focus, and transparency of style) are fundamentally suspect. They do so, moreover, without supplying a viable alternative of their own, at least not one that is recognizable in and through the terms of the existing order. Thus both the narrator and the text, on the regressivist reading, are guilty of dereliction in abandoning the tasks appropriate to their positions, which are at once to advance the state of their fields and to work in support of those fields' established ends.

The conflict between these two positions largely defined the parameters of *Invisible Man*'s critical reception over a major portion of its history. But as noted previously, a debate concerning the relative merits of realism and modernism was already by the early fifties a predominantly backward-looking one in connection with either literature or mass culture, and the same could reasonably be said of any serious consideration of socialism or the Communist Party as mainstream actors in American politics. The more timely issue was the future of modernism itself and, in politics, the appropriate conduct of the Cold War and of the nascent civil rights movement. While the misplaced emphasis on the novel's relationship to a past problematic doubtless helped to obscure its potential intervention concerning more contemporary issues, the details of these two readings or the fact of their opposition can nevertheless provide a useful point of departure for an approach to its content and its historical position.

What is required if we are to understand the Invisible Man's evolution as relevant to the crisis of late modernism is a compelling way in which to read the conventional progressivist and regressivist narratives as mutually entailing and thus as aspects of a problematic internal to modernism itself. This reading turns on the substitutability of progress and program as they are figured in the text and deployed in the modernist project generally. In the novel, each of the programs considered and eventually rejected by the narrator makes at least an implicit (and usually an explicit) promise of progress as its necessary outcome. The kinds of advancement on offer differ in their details, but they share the prospect of providing material and political progress for a group with which the protagonist identifies (racially, economically, or otherwise) primarily by allowing him to do well himself. Thus the College offers the Invisible Man the prospect of becoming "a good farmer, a chef, a preacher, doctor, singer, mechanic" (43–44; tellingly, the words and their circumscribed range of opportunity are Norton's) or an "Educator" (his own,

including the capitalization) as a means by which to execute the "fate" or "destiny" of his race. The Brotherhood offers him authority, money, and a public platform to support his efforts on behalf of "Harlem," whatever specific content might correspond to that synecdochical signifier. Even Ras invites him and Clifton to become partners of a sort as leaders of his separatist movement before their antagonism finally congeals. In each of these cases, however, what is plain is that the program and its leaders desire the Invisible Man's involvement as a means to their own perpetuation; when his development threatens that end, he is abruptly and violently severed from the organization in question.

Significantly, none of these programs is ever presented as evolving or progressing from its initial configuration, beyond the minor variations of strategy best illustrated by the Brotherhood's frequent redeployments of the narrator himself. But the progressivist reading of the Invisible Man's development and of his presumed ability eventually to emerge from his hibernation into an effective "overt action" may well depend on a similar set of assumptions about the value and necessity of his sequence of disillusionments. This is to say that the model of intellectual and moral development he provides (a necessary series of initially attractive but ultimately alienating encounters with existing systems of belief, each replacing its predecessor only to be superseded in turn as a result of a similar process of disillusionment), and the eventual scholarly or intellectual withdrawal from public life that follows from it, may itself constitute an established and equally determinate program. Specifically, is the narrator's experience not a straightforward illustration of the inculcation of the centuries-old realist-rationalist liberal subject? He learns by his own experience to distrust the established knowledge presented to him, to evaluate new information rationally in service of his interests, and to continue this process ad infinitum for the sake of expanding its field of reference. This ameliorative program itself remains unchanged over the course of the novel, and there is nothing in the closing pages or in the epilogue that suggests it will be modified or rejected in the future that the narrative projects beyond the close of the text. But given the reading already proposed linking the narrator's development to the modernist project proper, the novel's arc becomes effectively a critique of the teleology implicit in the Poundian exhortation to "make it new!" which is thus revealed as conserving the aims if not the methods of Enlightenment rationalism, and hence the underlying principles of exactly the formal pro-

grams and schools it ostensibly rejects. Modernism is not, on this reading, a radically new historical development, but merely (at best) another stage in the dialectical unfolding of a single program. The link that the novel proposes between *Bildung* [development] and modernism thus serves to undermine exactly the point it is usually introduced to support, namely, the establishment through modernist techniques of a new form of subjective, political, and historical consciousness. Ellison's novel seems clearly unwilling to abandon the possibility of the type of break modernism posited, but it, like its narrator, withholds the explicit content that such an event might entail, preferring instead to suggest its immanent possibility, much as Gaddis's novel left Wyatt on the brink of a reversal the text itself could not explore.

To see how this works directly in the text of *Invisible Man* rather than at the more abstract level of the plot as a whole, we may consider the enigma posed by the narrator's public orations.[8] Of these there are three useful examples: the eviction scene, the boxing arena speech, and Tod Clifton's funeral.[9] All three follow roughly the same procedures: they are largely improvised, they rely heavily on repetition and emotional appeal, they are frequently ironic, they offer no explicit program, and they call for no specific action on the part of the audience (they are not, in the words of the Brotherhood, "scientific"), but they are intended to (and do) produce a state of undirected arousal or readiness for action.

Consider the eviction speech, delivered impromptu on the steps of a tenement in Harlem where an elderly couple ("Sister and Brother Provo") are being removed from their apartment in the dead of winter.[10] A crowd has gathered, angry at both the specific white men conducting the eviction and more broadly at the practice of turning their poor neighbors out of even the barest of homes, but this crowd lacks a clear sense of what action to take. Sister Provo moves to return to her apartment "to pray," a white man overseeing the eviction pushes her back, she falls, the crowd threatens him, he shows a gun, they move in on him, and violence of what would appear to be a particularly fruitless sort is immanent. Then, apparently without premeditation, using "all the shock-absorbing phrases that I had learned all my life," the narrator interrupts, hearing himself yelling "No, no . . . Black men! Brothers! Black Brothers! That's not the way. We're law-abiding. We're a law-abiding people and a slow-to-anger people" (275). He goes on, "talking rapidly without thought but out of my clashing emotions" (he has already described himself, on the brink of the attack, as "afraid and angry, repelled and

fascinated" by "what the violence might release in me"), repeating the adjectives *law-abiding*, *slow-to-anger*, and *wise* twenty-four times over the following four pages. Depending on what it is, exactly, that he seeks to accomplish, he either succeeds or fails; the crowd eventually rushes the man with the gun, beats him and his fellow agents, and begins carrying the Provos' belongings back into their apartment, but the police soon arrive (sending out a riot call), and the narrator flees over the rooftops to avoid arrest or worse.

It is this last point, concerning the success or failure of the speech, that is the most difficult to assess, as is also true of the other two major speeches. If, as it seems initially, the Invisible Man's objective is to pacify the crowd, his speech must be judged a failure; he at best delays their attack on the eviction men, and he does so to no tactical end; no one on either side who would otherwise have been harmed escapes, the attack is no less brutal for coming a few minutes later, neither the police nor any other force arrives to restore order before violence erupts, nor is the violence any more effective as a manifestation of political will for being delayed. His eventual direct appeal to the agents—"How about it, Mr. Law? Do we get our fifteen minutes of Jesus?"—produces only a sneer and praise of his ability to keep the people (temporarily) at bay, an outcome that further stokes both his and their anger.

But it is in a sense absurd to suggest that pacifism is the real aim. The narrator has already confessed a sense of exhilaration at the prospect of violence and has partially dissociated himself from his own actions by treating them (even at the time) as objects of detached scrutiny ("I heard myself yelling," "not at all what I intended," "I laughed in response as though hypnotized"). Moreover, his repetition of "law-abiding," "slow-to-anger," and "wise" grows increasingly ironic as he carries the device to greater lengths, especially as it becomes clear that the adjectives are linked to passivity and helplessness in the face of outrageous treatment at the hands of whites. If anything, the speech makes the final violence more compelling and more effective by simultaneously heightening the crowd's sense of righteous indignation and by providing the appearance of an attempt at reasoned dialogue. But this, too, is less than satisfactory as an account of the intervention's purpose or compelling power; the crowd hardly needs to be worked into a higher pitch of readiness (they are literally ready to die for their cause before the narrator so much as opens his mouth), and there is no one present at the scene, save perhaps the reader and the narrator himself, who needs to be convinced of the legitimacy of the impending action.

If the speech itself is superfluous or ineffective, why, then, is this a central episode of the novel, one that begins the Invisible Man's involvement with the Brotherhood and constitutes his first major public action? Jack and the Brotherhood's interest in the speech might be explained by its insistence on linking the immediate scene to a larger problematic and thus implicitly to the need for a more permanent organizational effort. This it accomplishes—and this too is a technique repeated in the later speeches—first by debasing the people it seeks to help. The elderly couple are thus said to occupy a "filthy" room filled with "junk," to have nothing to show for their labor, and to possess only a religion that has mistakenly "gone to [their] head." The speech then advances by suggesting that the elderly couple and their shame are figures for the larger social group of which they are a part (racially conceived, certainly, but not exclusively so; the introduction of labor is part of what attracts Jack specifically) and which suffers under similar conditions of deprivation and humiliation. The Leninist question, then, "What is to be done?" (277), is addressed less to the immediate moment (where the answer is obvious: rush the eviction agent and return the Provos' belongings to their apartment) than to the "law-abiding, slow-to-anger bunch of folks turning the cheek every day in the week," and the proffered answer, "I propose we do the wise thing, the law-abiding thing," can only be taken ironically, as its echo of the implicit rebuke in the preceding description makes clear. This move is repeated over the next two pages, where it culminates in a more explicit link between the "dispossession" of the couple and of the people as a body: " 'They ain't *got* nothing, they caint *get* nothing, they never *had* nothing. So who was dispossessed?' I growled. 'We're law-abiding. So who's being dispossessed? Can it be us?' " (279, emphasis in original).

If this identification between the Provos and the crowd is successful, the ensuing violence will be not an isolated protest against a single eviction but, in and through that specific act, the first step in a new line of resistance to a form of oppression. This is, however, an exceptionally indeterminate and tenuous moment, as are all such potential events, because the success or failure of the speech is a matter not of its immediate results (which are largely given in advance) but of the future history of the figure and the occurrence to which it may be linked. Thus the subsequent appropriation of the eviction "riot" as the first in a series of racial uprisings, or of workers' uprisings, or of something else altogether—or simply as an isolated incident—will determine what the speech accomplished at the time.

The relevance of the future past as the temporal register of the event is of course a feature that we have previously encountered. What is significant here is the uncertainty concerning the type and effectiveness of the figure that is being offered and hence of the fidelity that is being proposed. There are at least two established narratives into which the eviction revolt might be inserted with relative ease: one of black resistance to the raw exercise of white power—in which case the Provos' race is their characteristic feature, and the West Indian woman's exclamation "Black men, I'm proud of you!" is the distinguishing response—the other of struggle against the exploitation of the working class—in which case Brother Provo's misappropriated labor and the couple's poverty are the foremost consideration, and the mostly-white Brotherhood's presence at the scene is unremarkable. These narratives are "easy" in the sense that they are available for ready use; they preexist the eviction encounter and offer the prospect of explaining both the emotional impact of the speech itself and the meaning of the violence to which it is linked as expected occurrences, even though any judgment concerning the ultimate propriety of either interpretation must necessarily be made in retrospect from the position to which it can later be said to have led.

The narrator's ultimate problem—and in a larger sense, the book's central problem as well—is to determine whether or not these existing stories are revolutionary, that is, whether or not they identify important new elements of the situation; if they are, which one takes precedence as an object of fidelity; and if they are not, what other narrative or figure (if any) might be supplied in their place as a basis for transformative action. The narrator's solution to this problem depends on his evaluation of the class and race narratives as diagnoses of the void—the constitutively invisible element—in his contemporary situation. If either one works in such a way, that is, if it provides a figure or a name around which a new collectivity (the black tenant as a political actor, thus as an element of the political situation, or the dispossessed worker in a similar role) can (and must) be articulated through practice, this will necessarily entail a critical restructuring of the existing situation's state. Ras and the Brotherhood take distinct but structurally homologous positions in this respect; they see their own moment as blind to race or class as the fundamental terms of politics. Their actions and the programs that direct them are thus revolutionary, at least within their own terms, insofar as they work toward a radical reconfiguration of the situation in accord with these newly identified elements. The narrator, however, remains less than

fully committed to either position, even after he joins the Brotherhood, a stance anticipated by his speech's ambiguity concerning the primacy of race and class, as well as his lack of a clearly defined objective in making it. He is unwilling, it seems—and this becomes fully clear only at the close of the novel—to accept that either of the two proposed alternatives has successfully identified the invisible element of his situation, thus he must finally reject both as reactionary or disastrous rather than genuinely revolutionary.

It is along these same lines that the speeches figure Ellison's own relationship to modernism. Like the race- and class-based narratives available to the narrator, protest-realist and modernist forms represented potential approaches to developing the novel's basic *Bildung* material—and like the speeches, the novel makes frequent if conflicting use of the "phrases I had learned all my life"—but the larger narrative refuses to settle on the priority of either alternative as the interpretive key to the other. The novel as a whole parallels the speeches, moreover, by using repetition to build ironic distance between the repeated object's purported value and its actual function. Where "wise" and "law-abiding" (or the commands to "go home" and to "forget" in the funeral speech) thus become terms of derision, so too do both the naïve naturalist and complex but contradictory modernist techniques become suspect as they are linked to the narrator's repeated cycles of unsuccessful awakening and disillusionment (with naturalism linked in particular to Bledsoe and the College, while modernity is cast with the rational-cynical pragmatism of the Brotherhood). Finally and most importantly, just as the speeches, which culminate in the funeral oration that triggers the Harlem-wide riot, ultimately provide the basis for their own sublation by contributing to developments that discredit speech as an (or *the*) exemplary form of action, so too does the form of the novel (variable, progressive, indecisive) present a contrast with its outcome to demonstrate the final insufficiency of an "experimental attitude" to guarantee in itself the effectiveness of the alternatives it proposes. There comes, in short, in both cases a time for commitment in more than principle, and neither the narrator nor the novel itself is ultimately capable of making the transition from ironizing existing forms to embracing the new ones that irony helps to create.

The Riot as Evental Site

To see how this inability plays out, we must examine the final section of the main narrative. The Invisible Man's political ambivalence and the as-

sociated lack of both an elaborated philosophical or organizational framework and a concrete set of proposed actions in the eviction speech remain in place nearly to the end of the novel, and they continue to characterize the two later major speeches, both of which are said to arouse their audiences effectively, but neither of which addresses the question "What is to be done?" any further than does the first. Nevertheless, the speeches taken together, and the funeral oration for Tod Clifton in particular, do help to produce something close to an event in the strict sense: the "sho 'nough race riot" (552) of the closing pages. It is here that the narrator confronts the results of his call to action and is faced with the necessity of maintaining a fidelity to them or of rejecting them as a disaster. He comes exceedingly close to the first when he describes Dupre, in the act of burning his apartment block, as "a type of man nothing in my life had taught me to see, to understand, or respect, a man outside the scheme until now" (547). This is both an obvious allusion tying the narrator's invisibility to the limits of his own vision, and exactly the formula of the event, provided he can embrace the necessity of the new type of existence he has apparently identified. This is true even if this type is not one foreseen by Ras or by the Brotherhood, as the declaration that "nothing in my life had taught me" to perceive it suggests; Dupre may be available as a figure for the long-delayed realization of the new racial or class type previously proposed (although never yet seen, if its appearance is to constitute an event), but he is also a potential figure for a new kind of subject, one that has no preexisting articulation. This new subject—which is not reducible to Dupre himself, to the Invisible Man, or to any other previously recognizable individual or party—comes into being, is maintained, and develops strictly as a function of its ongoing support (or again, fidelity) by what Badiou would call the generic ensemble of actors it comprises. So long as people and groups behave as if Dupre's act is a legitimately political one, the revolution that might be said to bear his name (or Tod Clifton's, in the sense that his death is the marker of a political event) will continue as a truth process of politics.

But this potential moment of revolution, this evental site, is what both the Invisible Man and Ellison's novel ultimately abandon. In the narrator's case, his rejection of the event turns, as it must, on a reincorporation of the riot into the existing narratives, not as their initial emergence or rupture into broad political consciousness—that is, not as the beginning of a new political sequence—but instead as the predictable manipulation of those

discourses for the advancement of their established ends. Thus it is exactly the identification of the unrest and its individual acts, such as Dupre's, as a *race* riot, that proves to be decisive; the rest unfolds almost automatically, although it is a moment of disillusionment akin to Emerson revealing to him the contents of the letters from Bledsoe.[11] The Brotherhood pulled him out of Harlem, he sees, in order to provoke violence that would be explicitly framed as racial, notably by Ras, who would be sure to do his part to embrace and expand that violence. The inevitable defeat of a lightly armed, wholly unorganized uprising would produce a backlash that would destroy Ras in particular, but more importantly would damage black separatism generally, both immediately by killing its proponents and in the longer term by associating it among blacks with their own suffering and among whites with the threat of lawlessness and disorder. Thus, rather than seeing the riot and Dupre's part in it as the beginning of a new political order that he helped to make possible and that he might continue to sustain, the narrator renounces his role in creating it, claiming to have been a "tool" of the committee in making the rioters "ripe for death" (553). The riot is thus for him a disaster rather than an event because its violence is carried out solely in the service of the distinctions it purports to overturn; it merely reaffirms the status quo in the process of destroying Harlem, through its own residents, with particularly ruthless efficiency. Indeed, the fate of "Harlem" is another way of formulating the same point; the Invisible Man concludes that "Harlem" will mean the same thing after the riot as it did before, albeit poorer and with new suffering, and it is on this basis that he rejects the violence as a false promise of transformation.

Invisible Man confronts a similar moment of opportunity in the near coincidence of Rinehart's appearance and the narrator's disillusion with existing political alternatives. With the classic realist-protest novel firmly rejected in both style and substance, and with the modernist alternative likewise portrayed as offering little fruitful basis for new work, the novel, like the Invisible Man, could move toward its conclusion with the "infinite possibilities" embodied not by the narrator's impotent underground musing (or with modernism's perpetual but static novelty) but instead with an embrace of Rinehart's suggestively overdetermined antiessentialism. But the Invisible Man is unable to understand this possibility, and Rinehart becomes to him another type of man nothing in his life had taught him to see (a disability heightened by the sunglasses that reveal Rinehart's existence only by

further obscuring his vision), but one whose essence escapes him. He asks, in effect, the wrong question of Rinehart, demanding to know what single thing he really is (a pimp? a preacher? a hustler?), when he might instead have seen Rinehart's ability to be all of these things—and thus not precisely any of them—as indicative of what is missing from his own project, which revolves around the effectiveness of his existing schema of categorization (recall that the Rinehart episode precedes the riot). His confidence in the adequacy of his categories is ultimately destroyed by the riot, but like Dupre, Rinehart represents a rejected alternative, a potential path that the narrator is unwilling to accept because it would entail not just a radical reconception of what is possible but also a correspondingly sharp blow to his conception of himself and of the sociopolitical task at hand. Thus he maintains that Rinehart is a trickster, a con man of a type he already knows. Still, Rinehart's undeniable attraction, to the narrator and to Ellison alike, is based more on his illegibility than his illegality; he is what might replace invisibility—a figure capable of turning the misidentification and misunderstanding (he is, after all, an amalgam of most of the available, contradictory stereotypes of blackness) that frustrate the narrator, by mistaking his obscure true self, into registers of the futility of the quest for such an essence.

In spite of this allure, the narrator is never able to embrace his model and plays out the rest of the novel in search of the one thing he himself should become. We might again say the same of the novel, which, in creating Rinehart as a potential alter ego for the narrator, possesses a striking figure for the mixture of high and low, for the instability of personal identity, and for the indeterminacy and play that would soon characterize full-blown postmodernism. But neither the narrator nor the book can become Rinehart; the former retreats to his hole, the latter remains focused on the problems of individual identity and organized political action, treating with increased urgency in the epilogue the "principle" of American democracy and the individual's place within it. It is this principle and its problems that is then the final subject of the novel. "Subject" in two senses, both as the matter of the novel's content, which can thus be read as an explication of the threats and difficulties involved in "affirm[ing] the principle on which the country was built and not the men" so as to "become one, and yet many" (574, 577), and as its central actor, expressed through the figure of the narrator's tumultuous development. This move transforms and marginalizes the figure of Rinehart into one of simple diversity rather than radical alterity, and it ren-

ders the Invisible Man a similarly comprehensible and domesticated type of resisting patriot. This makes the subject in the second sense at once an individual affair (what matters in the end is that the narrator work to discover his true self and his true place in society, rather than any specific action he might undertake) and a simple collectivity, formed by the extension of this individual focus to all those who work toward the same readily identified end ("the principle" of an "America . . . woven of many strands").

Thus the novel closes with a protagonist who, like Wyatt at the conclusion of *The Recognitions*, has broken with the specific styles and categories of his period in favor of a backward-looking "return" to an earlier project figured in specifically American terms (in Gaddis it was Thoreau; here it is the ideal of democracy itself as an American trait). The problem in both cases—the reason they remain failures as avatars of an event or paradigms of a new aesthetic or cultural situation—is that the subject thus imagined is one that remains distinguishably individual. The kind of project in which their central characters are finally engaged are ones that are readily identifiable within the existing situation, and thus the characters are themselves easily accounted for as the kind of men who undertake that specific task (Wyatt as the disaffected artist seeking authenticity, the Invisible Man as the underground political schemer). There is nothing wrong with this position per se, but it represents in both cases a specific rejection of a potential event that the novel offered, however inchoately (and this is of course quite different in the two texts), as the basis of a possible alternative not just to the present moment but also to the historical narrative culminating in that situation. By withdrawing to established and identifiable positions, Wyatt and the Invisible Man each increase sharply the probability that the outcome of his actions will be similarly identifiable and predictable. And the same can be said of the novels themselves, which suggest the possibility of an alternative to the strategies and constraints of their contemporaries but which are ultimately unable to embrace the consequences of rejecting them comprehensively.

It may, finally, be worth comparing this situation very briefly to the structuring fantasy of one of the decade's other most enduring literary texts, *On the Road*. Kerouac's novel likewise explores the possibility of a position outside the confining social and political structures of the American fifties, only to find that position precisely among the existing stock of figures. In Kerouac's case, the terms are again those of race and class (and, to a lesser extent, sexuality); Sal Paradise repeatedly imagines that his happiness

lies in identifying with one or another romantically marginalized group, from Mexican farm workers to African American musicians to white Okies and hobos. Again, what's conceived as a systemic alternative becomes in *On the Road* a simple reversal of valuation of positions that are already well defined and among which the central character must (but cannot finally) choose. Such reversals may be strategically useful, but they are never revolutionary. They're also easy to coöpt, as Andrew Hoberek has shown to great effect in his treatment of organization men and racial difference in *The Twilight of the Middle Class*. Sal's enthusiasms make this point especially visible today, built as they are so clearly on fetishistic period stereotypes of difference. But the problem is equally applicable to Gaddis's and Ellison's texts, which suffer, albeit more subtly, from the same horizon of vision. It's a horizon that leads them to misidentify existing terms within their situation, to believe for a time that those terms are truly new, but that leaves both their protagonists and the texts themselves finally adrift when faced with the consequences of their errors.

For a more fruitful attempt to forge a new subject of contemporary literature and politics, one better able to recognize and act on the event of modernism's collapse, we need a text that addresses not only the consequences of that collapse but also the mechanics of developing a system of nonmodernist representation. Doris Lessing's *Golden Notebook* is almost that book, one that falls so narrowly short of articulating a full-blown postmodernity that we might call it the last text of late modernism.

7

Integration and Disorder in *The Golden Notebook*

> She said to herself, rather surprised at the thought: This is precisely how I would commit suicide.
>
> —Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*

The Golden Notebook provides a more promising case study concerning both the possibilities and consequences of radical changes in subjectivity than does either *The Recognitions* or *Invisible Man*. Doris Lessing's novel, although published a decade after Ellison's and concerning a substantially different milieu, engages a similar macroscale problem, namely, the effects of, and responses to, a crisis in the established forms through which its central character understands her situation. This shift is not, of course, entirely (or even largely) personal, but in both texts the concern is primarily with an individual figure through which its crisis is registered. The protagonist Anna's (although the referent of the name *Anna* will become complicated below) response to this situation—a movement first into, and then out of, disorder and madness—offers a suggestive model of a process initiated by that crisis and presenting the possibility of resolving it, but it is careful to indicate as well the ease with which the elements of an incompletely overturned situation may reassert themselves. We are left, finally, with a book that puts into practice a way of forming new subjects, even though it isn't able to take up the content that would be required to sustain them. *The Golden Notebook* gives us, in short, an allegory of late modernism's end.

Sanity and Self-Fragmentation

Lessing's novel is famously a book about "cracking up," a theme that pervades its three parts. The embedded *Free Women* novella, after opening with Anna's observation that "as far as I can see, everything's cracking up" (3), proceeds to demonstrate that claim in a series of conventional conflicts concerning families and friendships summarized cleanly in tone and substance in the story's (and novel's) closing line, "the two women kissed and separated" (623), their parting completing the process of separation initiated at the outset. Much more complicated are the disintegrations explored in the four individual notebooks and the golden notebook.[1] These are built around Anna's self-division into four parts, each at least nominally distinct from the others; she feels this separation has occurred "almost automatically" (53), but it troubles her and she reproaches herself for her resulting inability to put "all of myself in one book" (568). Still, she fears even more, until near the end of the novel, the "chaos" that would result from recording her experience in "one big book without all those divisions and brackets and special writing" (257). The golden notebook, then, contains her attempt to overcome that chaos by engaging it, reintegrating her four selves in the process of recording her relationship of mutual mental and emotional instability with the American writer Saul Green (who may or may not be yet another aspect of herself). The success or failure of this integrative project depends on one's reading of the link between the notebook and the *Notebook*. Saul is said to have given Anna the first line of a new book, one that will break her out of her writer's block and (what is portrayed as the same thing) bring her back to sanity. The line is "The two women were alone in the London flat," which opens both *Free Women* and *The Golden Notebook*; if the novel Anna writes is (only) the former, individual integration and sanity are relatively straightforward, and she achieves both.[2] If, however, she is the nominal author of *The Golden Notebook*, the case is vastly more complex, encompassing a comprehensive range of self-inclusion but at the same time a much less clear sense of either sanity or order, since it implies a character who has written herself into existence ex nihilo.

There is a passage from the middle of the novel, recounted in the blue notebook that serves as a diary, that illustrates Anna's problem concisely. In it she describes a dream that precedes her final visit to Mrs. Marks, her analyst, in which she sees herself present a box, "a kind of casket" containing "something very precious" to "a small crowd of people." The passage continues:

> I was incredibly happy that I could give them this precious object. But when I handed it over, I saw suddenly they were all businessman, brokers, something like that. They did not open the box, but started handing me large sums of money. . . . I opened the box and forced them to look. But instead of a beautiful thing, which I thought would be there, there was a mass of fragments, and pieces. Not a whole thing, broken into fragments, but bits and pieces from everywhere, all over the world—I recognized a lump of red earth that I knew came from Africa, and then a bit of metal that came off a gun from Indo-China, and then everything was horrible, bits of flesh from people killed in the Korean War and a communist party badge off someone who died in a Soviet prison. This, looking at the mass of ugly fragments, was so painful that I couldn't look, and I shut the box. (237–38)

The precious object desired but unexamined by the crowd of businessmen is plainly, at least at first, a figure for *Frontiers of War*, Anna's novel about her experiences in Africa during World War II, which she has since renounced as the product of "a lying nostalgia" (60) but which has been the object of sustained commercial interest from film producers who show little concern for even its minimal and misleading authenticity. The dream quickly changes, however, to concern Anna's later situation, notably through its introduction of fragmentation. Whereas the earlier novel had maintained a facile unity by conforming precisely to type (a review, quoted with resigned agreement by Anna herself, claimed that it presented "very little new . . . about the black-white conflict" and was "sprung by little more than a warm-hearted indignation against injustice" [57]), her current problem as she is composing the notebooks is that she can no longer integrate the disparate aspects of her experience. The contents of the box—emblems of Africa, war, and the Communist Party, all of which are the objects of her accounts in the notebooks—are the raw accumulation of that experience absent the unification that she would herself be expected to provide as its subject, that is, as the one to whom the experiences they represent are proper. What she substitutes in place of such unity is a catalog of details bound together only by their physical proximity and continuity in the notebooks, and even this nominal unification is rendered doubtful by her inability to join the four notebooks into one. Moreover, the disunity of her writing increases over the course of each notebook, so that by the end of any one, Anna can do little more than assemble newspaper clippings loosely related to its topic, a symptom of her

failure to assert any effective subjective authority over their increasingly anti-narrative content.

The dream also presents a difficult tension in Anna's work with respect to modernism. Her condemnation of *Frontiers of War* goes on to critique, in addition to its falsifying nostalgia, its "longing for license, . . . for the jungle, for formlessness." On one hand, Anna thereby charges herself with having practiced in the earlier novel a kind of unreconstructed realism in the nineteenth-century sense, that is, with having used the tropes and narratives of war, exile, and transgression to tell a story that everyone—even her "cultivated and literary friends," she says—can read as the transparent confirmation of what they already "know" about Africa, about love, about politics, and so on, even (or especially) if, as Anna claims, "there's nothing in it that wasn't true."[3] On the other hand, though, she maintains that novels are (or ought to be) importantly different from reportage and that some kind of emotion—just not a pre-given one, not a lying nostalgia—underlies the distinction. But the final twist is that a desire for formlessness, for emotion free from existing forms, for *newness*, is itself already by the early fifties a cliché, an established structure of feeling. And so Anna suffers from writer's block, manifested not as a difficulty in producing words (the notebooks expand without trouble over time, at least until the late stages of Anna's disorder) but as an inability to order them into recognizable narratives, because she cannot find a way out of the conflicting imperatives to feel and not to feel, to give form and to withhold it.[4]

While some critics have found it useful to read Anna as an autobiographical surrogate for Lessing (and there are clearly a number of areas in which one would be justified in doing so), this issue of blockage is certainly not one the author shares with her character, even if the problem that gives rise to it is one of which Lessing is acutely aware.[5] The obvious conclusion—if we are persuaded by the preceding genealogy of Anna's block—is that Lessing has found a way to address the contradiction that paralyzes Anna. On the face of things, she seems to have simply ignored half of the dilemma and to have taken up the method of Joyce and others in collecting an exhaustive, temporally ordered chronicle organized around the personal experience of a central intelligence. In fact, Lessing pushes this technique far enough toward a pole of disintegration and arbitrary regrouping—the formal manifestations of Anna's intuition that everything is "cracking up"—that it is tempting to read the novel as the culmination or perfection of the spirit, if

not exactly the style, of its great modernist practitioners. But to do so, to read Lessing as straightforwardly modernist, would be to ignore the ways in which she subverts the modernist form of encyclopedism in favor of the transitional version explored in chapters 4 and 5. Or we might instead say that *The Golden Notebook* works to recall the provisional, unstable status of the encyclopedia's epistemic claims after they have been canonized in their modernist deployment. To put it a third way, we could say that Lessing uses encyclopedism against itself by demonstrating—encyclopedically—that the encyclopedic form can no longer encircle its subject.

Two examples will help to clarify the distinction between modernist and transitionally accumulative encyclopedism. The first occurs at the level of content, though it has a direct impact on the novel's technical form. Recall that for Mendelson and the modernists alike, the encyclopedia is effective largely on the basis of synecdoche; the central figure of an encyclopedic narrative must be in some sense an everyman character. We see this in Joyce's Bloom, Musil's Ulrich, and Proust's Marcel (provided in Marcel's case we are concerned with the experience of temporality rather than, say, class) fully as much as in Dante, Melville's Ishmael, or Pynchon's Slothrop (all characters drawn from Mendelson's short list of national-encyclopedic texts).[6] It is difficult, however, to read Anna in exactly the same way. In addition to gender—to which I will return below—virtually all of Anna's traits and commitments stand in the way of interpreting her as the national-allegorical figure Mendelson requires, that is, as the part performing straightforwardly in place of a British or Anglo-American whole.[7] This is not to claim, of course, that Anna does not function synecdochically and allegorically, but instead that the tenor for which she stands can only with difficulty be taken as a specifically national or international subject.

Even dropping the ill-considered link between encyclopedia and nation, however, and replacing the latter with a community of more flexible and indeterminate scale, Anna presents a difficult case. Unlike Wyatt, Stanley, and the other characters of *The Recognitions*, who both inhabit and largely constitute an artistic ecosystem that in turn functions as a figure for a national and cultural situation, or the Invisible Man, who exists for most of the novel in relation to similarly delimited institutions or groups (the College, the Brotherhood, Harlem), Anna has no such singular, clearly defined circle. This means in turn that her specific features and identifications—including her status as a writer (by her own assessment, roughly equivalent to the role

of observer rather than participant), her ambivalently Communist politics, her similarly ambivalent British national origin—rather than locating her as a representative member of a particular institution or group serve to set her apart as atypical with respect to each collectivity insofar as she maintains links to all of them. So although, for example, she may be a typical member of the British Communist Party, doubting and conflicted, her party membership, like her African experience, makes her an atypical writer and British citizen. And while it is entirely possible that these conflicts might be reconciled in a new figure of postwar subjectivity built on novel categories of filiation and association, those categories do not yet exist, and this discrepancy is largely responsible for her breakdown.

But it is gender and so-called gender relations that are the most interesting sticking-point on the way to seeing Anna as a generically representative figure. This is true in part due to the very old problem of the masculine coding of the universal subject position—it is not by accident, of course, that Mendelson linked synecdoche to every*man*—but the issue is complicated in *The Golden Notebook* because Anna is not simply the outsider to Willi's or Michael's or Richard's or Saul's insider; she is one-half of a female-male binarism that is itself the true subject of interpersonal experience in the novel and to which neither female nor male position is individually adequate. If we read Anna's nonrelationship with Saul as an account of this binarism wholly internal to "Anna" (or Anna-Saul, an entity not equivalent to Anna-the-writer, Anna-the-Communist, etc.), we can see that this is the potential solution to the problem, the potential reinstatement of Anna as a properly tropological figure.[8] The difficulty, though—and this is an entry into the second, formal example of the ways in which the novel works against modernist encyclopedism—is that we are presented with two deeply unappealing versions of its outcome.

The first and most obvious of these is to read *Free Women* and Saul's (or Saul-Anna's) short novel about the Algerian soldier as characteristically female and male texts, respectively. Each writer is able to give the other the first sentence of his or her book, but they agree that they each could not go further in the other's domain. We would be wise to discount this option, both because it maintains the female-male binarism in neat, historically conditioned terms (Anna's novella is domestic and centered on personal relationships and sex; Saul's is martial, philosophical, resolved in violence) and because the form of *Free Women* is equally retrograde, a well-made story of the

old type, and not a particularly good one at that. It interests us as a part of *The Golden Notebook*, in juxtaposition with the notebooks and Anna-the-editor's frame narrative, but certainly not as a free-standing piece of fiction.

The alternative is to reject *Free Women* and Saul's text as concluding statements and to turn instead to the golden notebook. It is into this notebook that Anna resolves to put "all of herself," to end the fragmentation and deceptive pseudo-order of the separate notebooks, and to reconcile her various selves. The attempt, at least as Anna frames it, is to reject the artificial classificatory scheme she imposed on herself at the outset in favor of an organic, self-structuring whole. The notebook meets with some success on this score; it does incorporate elements of the four major areas kept separate in the preceding notebooks and attempts to link them to one another not merely sequentially but thematically and emotionally as well. Thus we find Anna developing her relationship with Saul through references to Paul Tanner, the fictional character from the yellow notebook, while simultaneously recalling her days at the Mashopi Hotel and analyzing her own psychological state. Most characteristic, perhaps, is the dream-psychosis episode in which she describes her past experiences as being presented to her on film by a mocking projectionist who taunts her with her own authorship of them.

But the unified notebook suffers from several difficulties. For one thing, its unity is largely notional; the incidents it recalls are all said to belong to a single Anna rather than to any specifically compartmentalized version of her (Anna-the-writer, Anna-the-Communist, and so on), but apart from being mixed together on the page, there are few instances in which they join to form compelling or transformative combinations. If there is a unity that emerges over the course of the notebook, it is the primacy of heterosexual intimacy, expressed both as the section's main focus through the relationship with Saul and as the element recovered from the disparate prior notebooks. But this move represents less an integration of fragmented experiences than those fragments' irrelevance or subsumption under a single one of their number. Even this minimal and prophylactic unification, however, seems to be more than Anna can survive, since the notebook records the progress of her descent into madness of a full-blown sort precisely as a result of her attempt to hold these aspects of herself together, that is, to play "the game" (512–13) of seeing the world steadily and whole (the Arnoldian overtones in this case drawing attention to the futility of the project long past the end of the Victorian era). Nor is it satisfying to read Anna's implied recovery at

the end of the notebook as a solution to the problem of unification. The notebook begins and ends with Saul's handwriting and ownership—first in his inscription-cum-curse and last with his Algerian novel—which would pose no problem if the link between Saul and Anna as aspects of the same personality were maintained. Such an identity is hard to maintain, however; Saul leaves when it becomes clear that his presence is responsible for Anna's insanity. As a practical matter, there is the additional complication that Saul takes the golden notebook with him; it does not and cannot contain *Free Women* (which Anna begins on loose paper, outside the framework of any notebook), nor can it be transformed in any literal way into *The Golden Notebook* itself. Authorship and reference are indisputably complicated and circular in the text, but one claim that we can make with confidence is that the golden notebook does not subsume *The Golden Notebook*.

Anna's difficulty in creating a unified subject of her narrative is also manifest in both the golden notebook and elsewhere in the text as a preference for binarisms and an aversion to sameness. This sometimes produces a useful, or at least acceptable, alignment of political commitment, as with her initial attraction to the British Communist Party and eventual estrangement from it, or her opposition to late colonialism in Africa, but it is a hindrance in the case of what Adrienne Rich has called her "proto-feminism."[9] Particularly illustrative is Anna's almost comical homophobia, which finds its most symptomatic expression as she attempts to integrate her experiences in the golden notebook. Early in the chapter, she has a rare feeling of well-being after making love to Saul and briefly luxuriates in the experience of her own body, but when Saul leaves the room her contentedness turns to revulsion:

> I realized my body was distasteful to me. . . . I remembered Nelson telling me how sometimes he . . . saw his wife as a sort of spider, all clutching arms and legs around a central devouring mouth. I sat on my bed and I looked at my thin white legs and my thin white arms, and at my breasts. My wet sticky center seemed disgusting. . . . This feeling of being alien to my own body caused my head to swim, until I anchored myself, clutching out for something, to the thought that what I was experiencing was not *my* thought at all. I was experiencing, imaginatively, for the first time, the emotions of a homosexual. (572)

Although this passage appears to describe Anna's estrangement from her body, and hence to associate her revulsion with separation rather than uni-

fication or similarity, the circumstances and resolution of the incident suggest otherwise. Her sense of well-being evaporates only when she is left alone, without Saul to channel her sexuality, a dependency that repeats the earlier description of Ella's and Paul's priority of desire.[10] Her distaste is the result of being forced to examine only herself, without a heterosexual counterpart to perceive and validate her as a sexual object. It is then through her fantasy of (uniquely male) homosexuality as a matter of heterosexual revulsion that she restores order to the situation in a double move, first by externalizing and disowning it ("not *my* thought at all") and then by conceiving of homosexuality, which might threaten the sexual order on which she relies, as fundamentally structured by a simply inverted heterosexual opposition (distaste for the other rather than attraction to the same); it may not be her thought, but it's certainly recognizable within her terms.[11] What she attempts to avoid above all is a turn inward, to understand her potential alienation from her body as a part of who or what she is rather than as a readily identifiable aspect of her external situation. Nor is her reaction, maintaining an evident opposition on the basis of a normalizing similarity, unique to this instance; it characterizes her formulation of sexuality and sexual relations generally (see especially the incidents described in notes 10 and 11, as well as the deployment of clitoral ["mechanical"] and vaginal ["real"] orgasm [201–2]), of nationality (her Americans in particular are a confused mix of pseudocolloquial *gee!*s and restless energy with resolutely British *shall*s and class concern), and of subjectivity itself (determined always in relation to an other who is fundamentally like herself).

It is this conservative tendency that lies at the heart of the novel's concern for "cracking up" and that drives the anxiety expressed in Anna's dream about the fragments. Beginning with her repudiation of *Frontiers of War*, which seemed (and seems) once to have told a coherent and compelling story about what subsequently became the disparate aspects of her existence—politics, art, sex, community, nation—Anna records in the notebooks her progressive failure to maintain ever smaller domains organized according to her existing principles. When these fail, she is left not just with the chaotic remnants of a macroscale system that she does not understand but also with an array of unrelated microsystems that are similarly and individually baffling. Thus the notebooks, the records of her specialized attempts at small-scale order, end, respectively, with:

— Newspaper clippings concerning violence in Africa, and Anna's realization that even after trying to peel back the distortions of her earlier novel, "what I 'remembered' was probably untrue" (black).
— More newspaper clippings, and the story of Comrade Harry's disillusionment with the Soviet Union (red).
— A series of unrelated suggestions for unwritten stories and a short, execrable literary pastiche (yellow).
— Anna's acknowledgment that the notebooks are, separately and collectively, an unworkable failure (blue).

As suggested above, the movement toward raw accumulation of data—here seen in the newspaper clippings, Anna's changeable and mistaken memories, and the unwritten story ideas—is a characteristic response to the crisis precipitated at an evental site. If *The Golden Notebook*, in contrast to Gaddis's and Ellison's work, is less immediately allegorical in its treatment of the crises related to specific paradigms of modernity, this is only because it engages them more directly. If, however, our interest is in the possibility of a new, postevent situation, the question must then be whether or not any system of unification emerges from the chaos depicted in the text, and the answer is then substantially more difficult and figural. The novel's directly proposed solutions (the golden notebook and *Free Women*) are not encouraging on this front, but its form and figuration suggest a conception of at least the project of subjectivization as an evental process. Although the novel, like Gaddis's and Ellison's before it, is ultimately unable to produce the subject figure for which it calls and therefore remains a transitional rather than a fully achieved work of postmodernism (or additionally, in its particular case, of postcolonialism, post-Communism, and post-Freudianism), its ability to engage the generic problem concerning the emergence of new paradigms constitutes a valuable contribution to the eventual production of such a subject.

The Subject Proper

Why should the response to a crisis in an existing regime require a subject or figure of subjectivity? Is this not a call to reinstate exactly the generic adequacy of a single individual—a new individual, to be sure, but nevertheless *an* individual—as the proper bearer of paradigms that these novels at least implicitly critique and possibly reject? Lessing's novel suggests

not, and its approach provides an integral complement to the Badiouian treatment of the event developed both in *The Golden Notebook* and in those texts previously considered.

Recall that for Badiou, the terms *event*, *subject*, *fidelity*, and *truth procedure* are mutually entailing. "A subject," he writes in *L'Etre et l'événement*, "is a finite local configuration of a generic procedure" (558); a "generic procedure"—another name for truth procedure—is the process by which the consequences of an event unfold in the emerging situation to which they themselves give rise. From the point of view of the old situation, however, the existence of the event in question is indiscernible; thus the event and its subject alike are maintained by fidelity to the conviction that they will be (and will have been) confirmed in the new situation. What is important in this circle of dependence is the existence of two distinct situations (with different operations of the count-as-one) whose break is marked by the retrospectively discernible existence of the event. The subject, constituted through its fidelity to that event, and hence to the existence of the break the event represents, is, properly speaking, an element of the new situation alone, or better, of the process by which that situation is effected. This implies that the composition of the subject, whatever it may eventually become in the new situation, cannot be a matter of assembling elements uniquely identifiable in the old situation, since the difference between the two consists precisely in their disagreement concerning the entities associated with the event. Badiou's way of putting this is to say that

> the names used by a subject, which supports the local configuration of a generic truth, *do not in general have a referent in the situation*. They therefore do not double the established language. But then what use are they? These are words that do designate terms, but terms that "will have been" presented in a *new* situation, the one that results from the addition to the situation of an (indiscernible) truth of that situation.[12]

Badiou's apparent shift from the subject itself to the names it deploys suggests an important aspect of how subjectivity works in his scheme. These two processes, subjectivity and nomination, are, like the subject and the event, mutually dependent; the "names" he has in mind are, for example, *party*, *revolution*, and *politics* for the subject-event that is itself "named" *Lenin,* or *faith, sacrifice*, *charity*, and *salvation* for the subject *Saint Paul* (*EE* 435). Two points are important to note here. First, the subjective names are

not exactly new, which is to say that they, like their subject and the event itself, do not emerge ex nihilo as acts of invention or will; *party* and *sacrifice* have existing meanings and uses in the situation from which emerge both the event and the subject that deploys them as revolutionary. At the same time, however, their attachment to particular meanings in an existing context does not imply that they mean the same thing or are deployed to the same ends when used by their evental subject. Indeed, the *eventfulness* of the event can be measured by the extent to which the meaning of *political action* or *realistic representation*, for example, are displaced from their previous usage in connection with the subject formation exploring their new possibilities. Second, the name of the subject no more designates an individual human being, even when it uses an individual's proper name, than the names it deploys correspond to invariant concepts of the existing situation.[13] Perhaps better in the second instance, then, is to understand the name of the subject and of its event as an ontological statement that can be verified only in the new situation it projects. In this case, the name *Cantor*, for example, is replaceable by the claim that "infinities exist"; likewise, "Christ is risen" is an effective substitute for *Paul*.

This last point helps to explain our understanding of the subject as "a finite local configuration of a generic procedure." Like the event, whose matheme "consists on the one hand of all the multiples belonging to its site, and on the other hand of the event itself" (*EE* 200), the subject consists of nothing external to its site apart from the recognition on the part of those elements that they exist as a configuration and that the configuration they embody is actively changing the situation itself. So the subject of a political revolution, for instance, comprises individual people who were recognizable within the old situation, but who act in accordance with or fidelity to the slogan "the revolution has begun" (or "the peasants are political actors," "the factory is a political site," and so forth; the details are of course unique to each situation) and who are thus actively reconstituting what it means to be a member of the polity. The multiplicities (the countable objects, the individuals) that make up a subject remain recognizable within the existing situation, but only as something other than subjects of the event, for example, as peasants or factory workers, but not as the constituents of a new political order. We should emphasize as well that neither the subject nor the event "knows" nor entails the endpoint of the process its fidelity constitutes; the revolutionary peasantry as a component of the subject that sustains the French Revolu-

tion works toward no preexisting or specifiable goal apart from maintaining the revolution itself.

One of the reasons behind the difficulty of both understanding the subject as an abstraction and formulating any particularly situated subject is thus that the subject has no existence proper to it. It is always disallowed or misidentified by the operation of counting within the situation it transforms—it appears either as an impossibility (it is invisible or nonsensical) or is normalized as a simple extension of existing entities and practices. Yet the subject and its associated event can exist only with respect to their specific set of existing conditions. There is no generic type or figure of subjectivity (or of the event), only contingently situated instances; there is no natural, ahistorical, or asocial multiplicity that corresponds to "the subject" or "the event."

In the literary case (as I have argued in the previous chapters), the result of the inherent obscurity of subject and event alike is a tendency for novelty of any potentially evental sort to result in texts that appear to be either incomprehensible (whether literally senseless or, more often, "bad," "conflicted," or "flawed") or assimilable to existing structures and approaches (as when Gaddis's dialogic discontinuities are read as a version of Joycean stream of consciousness). Because modernism made difficulty of comprehension one of its characteristic techniques, the difficult texts examined here tended not to be read as flatly incomprehensible in any straightforward sense but instead to be received as extensions of existing (difficult) forms. This is a diagnosis in which *The Recognitions* and *Invisible Man* in particular were complicit. They each succeeded in describing the conditions under which a new subject might emerge, but they stopped short of supplying a figure analogous to the revolutionary peasant, the Bolshevik, or the early Christian; that is, they ultimately reinscribed their own apparent exceptions within their existing situation rather than insisting on a different figure or procedure.

In *The Golden Notebook*, the process is more complicated. Anna's progression from successful writer through confused diarist, author, Communist, and expatriate to psychologically collapsed recluse and finally back to successful writer might well be read as providing a figure for the development of a new subject from the disintegration of an existing one. This works, up to a point. The subject of a literature that is literally "after-modern" will have identified a lack in the existing literary situation, will have seen that situation and the configuration that supports it, if not already cracking up, then as at least constantly threatening to do so under the pressure of the void or

the indiscernible that its techniques cannot recognize or depict. The first claim of this postmodern literary subject, like that of any revolutionary subject, will be that something else is possible, and it will make this claim before it has any particular notion of what that alternative might be. It is at this point that Lessing's text diverges from Gaddis's and Ellison's; where both of the previous novels make this claim in general terms, they turn back toward the nineteenth century at the level of their first-order plot, and they proceed only fitfully in form and figure to advance a new kind of writing fundamentally different from their predecessors. More importantly for our immediate purposes, the figures they offer as the bearers of this project are finally unequal to it, and turn back themselves toward previously recognizable forms.[14]

The Golden Notebook is much less certain on this score. As suggested in the previous section, if Anna is the author simply of *Free Women* and the keeper of her notebooks, she resembles Wyatt and the Invisible Man in retreating from crisis into established forms (the diary, the scrapbook, the well-made realist novel) and is thus a difficult figure on which to build a model of alternate subject formation in the revolutionary sense. But it is also plausible that she might be read as the author of *The Golden Notebook*, in which case the dynamic is much more interesting. Anna's authorship is impossible to establish in any thoroughgoing way due to the Escher-like structure of the narrative; Anna is a fictional character in *Free Women*, in which embedded text we are told that she has written the four notebooks and the golden notebook, in which she appears as a character and at the end of which she, Anna, the character in *Free Women*, vows to write a book that is apparently *Free Women*. This organization, in which the whole of *The Golden Notebook* purportedly writes itself by way of its own centrifugal motion (the content of the notebooks moving always away from that of *Free Women*, both by providing contradictory content and by including progressively less-personal, less-ordered versions of the frame narrative's well-made protagonist), provides a figure for the process of evental subjectivization.

The process begins with a stable, well-ordered character. The Anna of *Free Women*, her claim to perceive disintegration all around her aside, is at first wholly unexceptional; she has friends and relationships that are particular to her but easily identifiable as existing types, and her circumstances are recounted transparently enough, revealed either in ordinary dialogue or conventional third-person omniscient narration, absent any suggestion of the involution that will later recast her as her own creation and the narra-

tion as consequently first-person rather than third. The notebooks, however, reveal not just her instability but the necessity of her self-division. It is only by holding parts of herself separate from one another and understanding each one along conventional narrative lines that she is able to sustain the illusion that "Anna" exists as the whole of those parts. But she is increasingly unable to maintain what she comes to see is not simply a series of individual fictions but is, more importantly, a fantasy concerning their relationship. This is not to say, although Anna necessarily claims otherwise, that any of these narratives is false in itself; instead, the point is that Anna eventually rejects them as adequate descriptions her situation. The result is chaos, in which "Anna" the fantasy object falls apart, rendered unrecognizable as she is effaced by the record of disordered external phenomena that take over her place in the notebooks. This at least is the view of her from her existing situation, complicated but rendered more immediate because she serves as both the evental site and the recorder of its development.

It is at this point that the elements of the plot diverge from the broader implications of the text. As suggested above, Anna retreats from the brink of whatever event might be possible for her to affirm in the confusion of her identity; there is no new collectivity, no reconfiguration of multiplicities for her under the name *Anna*. At most, she moves from being the author of *Frontiers of War* to that of another autobiography, more honest, perhaps, and covering different material, but a story of the same person. But the metafictional Anna, the one who has written every word in *The Golden Notebook* and who is thus unavoidably a figure for Lessing, has created a new form—neither exactly memoir nor fiction nor cultural critique—on the way to creating the "Anna" who is her character. The metafictional Anna comprises the array of parts that "Anna" can never manage to organize; she is all of the notebook Annas, as well as the *Free Women* Anna and the editor Anna who comments briefly on features of the notebooks. And she refuses to elevate any one of those existing versions of Anna to a position of privilege, construing them instead as the components through which to form a new situation by way of their legibility as a single thing, as the subject of the novel.

This Anna, the large-scale, metafictional one, is the book's allegorical tenor. She is never seen directly—the reader encounters her only through her identifiable component parts, none of which is equivalent to her—but the possibility of her existence transforms those pieces into the potential elements of a new subject figure of the novel. This in turn is how the even-

tal subject works, and how it alters the situation by making existing figures allegorical, so that the story they tell is a new one, one imperfectly legible and changing over time. It is *this* process that constitutes Lessing's contribution to the formation of a new literary method; not one achieved, but one avowed as the possible outcome of a process of allegorical torsion in the existing situation.

And so we come within sight of the end of late modernism. The move that Lessing's text undergoes, displacing its allegory from the level of content to the metafictional form of the text, is only a short step from postmodernism proper, and it's no surprise that, within a few years, the impasses of the late modern had been left behind. Even Lessing herself eventually turned to genre fiction. But that doesn't mean that the literature of the fifties was an error or a false start. It was, instead, the expected product of a literary-cultural moment undergoing the profound economic and social shifts that arrived at midcentury. There was at the time no better developmental route for literature to pursue than the one that led from Gaddis and Ellison to Lessing. This is the path from allegory to encyclopedia to subject. Lessing arrived at the end of it, providing in the process an end point for one era and the beginning of another.

Notes

Chapter 1: The Fifties on Their Own

1. For a standard overview of New Modernist Studies as it existed in the mid to late 2000s, see Mao and Walkowitz, the critics perhaps most closely associated with the rise of the movement itself.

2. It seems telling that the best and most incisive literary-critical text of our century so far is Mark McGurl's *The Program Era*, a deep and subtle historicist work devoted to the institution of the creative writing program rather than to the large-scale social forces that were gathered together under the heading of postmodernism.

3. There are just fifteen citations of nondissertation publications related to *Infinite Jest* in the MLA bibliography before 2008, the year of Wallace's death. Nor was the book radically more popular with readers. It sold well on release, for an 1100-page work of "serious" fiction, though its numbers were modest by even literary fiction standards. D. T. Max quotes 150,000 copies sold through the first decade in print (288); Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* sold as many in its first year. Neither came anywhere near appearing on mainstream bestseller lists the year it was released.

Chapter 2: Allegory

1. Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama* 160, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *OG*.

2. That is, the subordination of the material to the transcendent will always remain clear.

3. *Statesman's Manual* 30. The Greek reads "which is always tautegorical"; tautegory is defined in contradistinction to allegory as same-speaking (rather than other-speaking). Coleridge's theory of the symbol is stated succinctly on page 79 of the same text and more elaborately in chapters 14 and 17 of his *Biographia Literaria*. Paul de Man glosses Coleridge's theory in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" 191–94. Compare Coleridge's formulation to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's analogous claim that

> there is a great difference whether a poet is looking for the particular that goes with the general, or sees the general in the particular. The first gives rise to allegory where the particular only counts as an example, an illustration of the general; but the latter in fact constitutes the nature of poetry, expressing something particular without any thought of the general, and without indicating it. Now whoever has this living grasp of the particular is at the same time in possession of the general, without realizing it, or else only realizing it later on (*Maxims* 33–34, #279/750).

See also Friedrich Schelling's description of the symbol as that which is "as concrete and self-identical as the image, and yet as universal and significant as the concept" (*Philosophy of Art* 49).

4. See de Man, "Rhetoric of Temporality" 192–93.

5. See, for example, the passages from the *Acta eruditorum* quoted by Benjamin at *OG* 173. This is a general point not confined to the Baroque and its antecedents.

6. For a particularly illuminating consideration of the link between allegory and the difficulties or impasses of representation, see Fredric Jameson's "From Metaphor to Allegory." On Benjamin and the context-dependence of allegorical interpretation, see also Angus Fletcher's "Allegory without Ideas."

7. The full text of Opitz's statement in English translation is given as the epigraph to this chapter. It is quoted by Benjamin at *OG* 172. Even if Opitz is correct in his (now conventional) assessment, medieval allegory may still have responded to a crisis of representation associated with a dialectical relationship between opposed terms, for example, between acquired and revealed knowledge or between human and divine authority. See, for instance, the *Arcades Project* (*AP*) 324/J53a,1, which quotes *OG* 226 on the relationship between antiquity and Christianity in the High Middle Ages.

8. The quotation is from the oft-cited fourth section ("The Fetishism of the Commodities") of volume 1, chapter 1 of Marx's *Capital*. Benjamin refers to this section at J80,2/J80a,1 of the *Arcades* (368–69), a passage that offers one of his most explicit links between allegory and the commodity. See also J67,2, quoted below in the main text.

9. We are not, after all, in search of any fundamental guarantor of meaning or of interpretability. The particular, historically contingent conditions of past guarantors are of interest here. On the nature of the relationship between commodities, value, money, and price, see *Capital* volume 3, chapter 9, which introduces the "transformation problem" concerning the link between commodity values and prices of production.

10. Compare this idea of lack to Badiou's use of the term *void* and the mark ∅, taken up in chapter 3 below.

11. Timothy Bahti makes a similar point in his *Allegories of History*, in which he concludes that Benjamin's theory of allegory turns finally on "the passage across the line demarcating the signifier from the signified" (278), a passage that in Baudelaire, at least, is mediated through the commodity, which "(re)introduces the allegorical structure 'within the thingly or material world itself'" (211, quoting Benjamin's *Zentralpark* 660).

12. Charles Baudelaire, "Allégorie," Poem 114 or 118, depending on the edition, of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: page 161 in the French Gallimard edition and page 62 in *The Poems and Prose Poems of Charles Baudelaire*, trans. James Huneker (New York: Brentano's, 1919).

C'est une femme belle et de riche encolure,
Qui laisse dans son vin traîner sa chevelure.
Les griffes de l'amour, les poisons du tripot,
Tout glisse et tout s'émousse au granit de sa peau.
Elle rit à la Mort et nargue la Débauche,
Ces monstres dont la main, qui toujours gratte et fauche,
Dans ses jeux destructeurs a pourtant respecté
De ce corps ferme et droit la rude majesté.
Elle marche en déesse et repose en sultane;
Elle a dans le plaisir la foi mahométane,
Et dans ses bras ouverts, que remplissent ses seins,

Elle appelle des yeux la race des humains.
Elle croit, elle sait, cette vierge inféconde
Et pourtant nécessaire à la marche du monde,
Que la beauté du corps est un sublime don
Qui de toute infamie arrache le pardon.
Elle ignore l'Enfer comme le Purgatoire,
Et quand l'heure viendra d'entrer dans la Nuit noire,
Elle regardera la face de la Mort,
Ainsi qu'un nouveau-né—sans haine et sans remord.

[Here is a woman, richly clad and fair,
Who in her wine dips her long, heavy hair;
Love's claws, and that sharp poison which is sin,
Are dulled against the granite of her skin.
Death she defies, Debauch she smiles upon,
For their sharp scythe-like talons every one
Pass by her in their all-destructive play;
Leaving her beauty till a later day.
Goddess she walks; sultana in her leisure;
She has Mohammed's faith that heaven is pleasure,
And bids all men forget the world's alarms
Upon her breast, between her open arms.
She knows, and she believes, this sterile maid,
Without whom the world's onward dream would fade,
That bodily beauty is the supreme gift
Which may from every sin the terror lift.
Hell she ignores, and Purgatory defies;
And when black Night shall roll before her eyes,
She will look straight in Death's grim face forlorn,
Without remorse or hate—as one new born.]

13. *Recognition* is an important and complicated term in the present study, a point developed at length in chapter 5, on William Gaddis.

14. Consider, for example, a child who is told by her mother that Santa Claus does not exist. She believes that her mother does not lie to her, but she also has clear evidence of Santa Claus's existence: she has received presents from him, heard her parents describe his work and his home, even met him in a department store. It is not for nothing that this moment of disillusionment is a widely shared, unpleasant childhood experience, since it provokes major reconsiderations of the trustworthiness of parents, the nature of miracles, the reliability of direct experience, and so on. See also Thomas Kuhn's related account of a child's relationship to the word *mother* in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (128).

15. Recall that Coleridge's attack on allegory quoted earlier likewise dismissed it as "but a translation."

16. A useful interpretation of Benjamin's views on myth is provided in Susan Buck-Morss's *The Dialectics of Seeing*, especially chapters 4, 5, and 8, which culminate in a close

linking of dream and the "wish image" to myth in the *Arcades Project*. For Benjamin's early analysis of the relationship between myth and allegory, see *OG* 62 and recall that allegory is both the "condition" and the "spirit" (*OG* 235) of the *Trauerspiel*: "Historical life, as it was conceived at the time, is [*Trauerspiel*'s] content, its true object. In this it is different from tragedy. For the object of the latter is not history, but myth, and the tragic structure of the *dramatis personae* does not derive from rank—the absolute monarchy—but from the prehistoric epoch of their existence—the age of heroes."

17. *AP* 4, "Exposé of 1935"; "Each epoch . . . " quoted from page 6 of Michelet's "Avenir! Avenir!"

18. See *AP* 458/N1,9, in which Louis Aragon's "mythology" is contrasted to Benjamin's own "dissolution of 'mythology' into the space of history." None of this is to say that myth is exempt from historical change, but instead that the object of mythology and mythography differs fundamentally from that of history and historiography.

19. Note that this makes of "history" something profoundly ahistorical, a collection of points (objects, occurrences, relationships) related to one another not in time but through content or affinity.

Chapter 3: Event

1. For relatively accessible statements of their respective views on discontinuity and periodization, see Kuhn's "Second Thoughts on Paradigms," Foucault's "Preface to *The History of Sexuality*, Volume Two," Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and Braudel's "Histoire et économie: Le problème de la discontinuité."

2. On the biological origins of punctuated equilibria, see Eldredge and Gould. The operative analogy is to the process of speciation, in which an anomalous feature arises abruptly at a particular site smaller than, and in some sense isolated from, the situation as a whole. The new feature (which might be an idea, a social structure, a species, etc.) may then coexist for a longer or shorter period with the old regime from which it has broken, though it will often—and this is especially so in the cases of interest here—replace it in relatively short order.

3. Concerning the event as a philosophical and literary problem (or "knot"), see also Jacques Lezra's excellent *Unspeakable Subjects*, which develops a theory of the event as a distinctive feature of European modernity and provides detailed textual analyses suggesting the suitability of this concept to the specifically literary aspects of the issues raised in chapter 2.

4. These include *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1999 [1989]), *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (2000 [1997]), *Ethics: An Essay in the Understanding of Evil* (2001 [1993]), and *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (2003 [1997]).

5. On Badiou's systematicity, see especially Justin Clemens's "The System & the Act, or Philosophy as Ampersand."

6. All three systematic works are now available in translation, *Being and Event* appearing in 2006, followed by *Theory of the Subject* and *Logics of Worlds* in 2009.

7. *L'Etre et l'événement* 32, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *EE*. This and all translations from *EE* are my own, although I have frequently consulted Oliver Feltham's English edition. In the case of Badiou's other works that have appeared in English, citations are from the published translations unless otherwise indicated.

8. Compare *Le Nombre et les nombres* (*NN*) 60–61, addressing both the infinite and empty sets: "Just like the empty set, or zero, the infinite cannot be deduced: its existence must be decided axiomatically, which amounts to admitting that we hold its existence to be not a construction of thought but a fact of Being."

9. Peter Hallward provides a valuable introduction to the topic, geared specifically to Badiou's usage, in the appendix to his *Badiou*. Also useful are B. Madison Mount's "The Cantorian Revolution: Alain Badiou and the Philosophy of Set Theory," an attempt both to elaborate the implications of Badiou's use of set theory and to situate it within contemporary debates in the philosophy of mathematics, and David Foster Wallace's pop-technical *Everything and More: A Compact History of* ∞, which culminates in a discussion of Cantor and his successors in axiomatic set theory. Fully rigorous treatments are available in any number of textbooks in the field, of which Thomas Jech's *Set Theory* is among the canonical examples.

10. If this seems both obvious and trivial, it may be worth bearing in mind that set theory is of interest primarily insofar as it applies to infinite sets, the elements of which cannot be counted or compared (even in principle) by inspection. Note also that the definition of *set* given here is known technically as *naïve*; under axiomatic set theory, a set is any entity that satisfies all of the axioms of set theory. Although it is axiomatic set theory that is of interest to Badiou and to most mathematicians, the distinction is not important for the argument here.

11. Membership (*appartenance* in French) is symbolized ∈. If set $A = \{\alpha, \beta, \gamma\}$, then $\alpha \in A$.

12. So, for example, the set $\{\alpha, \beta\}$ is included in set A (or is a subset of A) as defined in the previous note, but it is not itself a member of A. This relationship is symbolized $\{\alpha, \beta\} \subset A$. The awkward "no . . . not . . . " form of the definition is required to avoid certain paradoxical results. Note that the elements α, β, and γ might themselves be sets, which helps to illustrate why Badiou emphasizes the *compte-pour-un* functional singularization or unification of sets; as a member of A, α (or β, or γ) is a single, countable entity, no matter how it might appear in another context.

13. The power set of A, written $P(A)$, is thus $\{\emptyset, \{\alpha\}, \{\beta\}, \{\gamma\}, \{\alpha, \beta\}, \{\alpha, \gamma\}, \{\beta, \gamma\}, \{\alpha, \beta, \gamma\}\}$, a set with eight members, that is, with cardinality $|P(A)| = 8$. Cardinality is also the concept that allows the natural numbers to be derived from the empty set (as stated above) by setting $\emptyset = 0$ and defining the successor $S(a) = a \cup \{a\}$ so that $1 = \{0\} = \{\emptyset\}$ (which has one element, namely, $\emptyset$), $2 = \{0, 1\} = \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$, etc. What this derivation confirms is that it is indeed possible to produce singular, countable entities from only the concept of nothingness and an abstract iterative operation.

14. Especially in connection with the four truth procedures as examined below. Compare Badiou's claim concerning ontology: "There are only situations. Ontology, if it exists, is *a* situation" (*EE* 33; emphasis in original).

15. Recall that $|P(A)| = 2^{|A|}$. Compare this relationship to that between the set of all natural numbers ($\mathbb{N} = 0, 1, 2, \ldots, n$) and the set of all real numbers ($\mathbb{R}$, which include the irrationals, that is, infinitely repeating decimals). Both of these sets are infinite, but the cardinality of $\mathbb{R}$ is (infinitely) greater than that of $\mathbb{N}$. This is true even though $|\mathbb{N}| = |\mathbb{Q}|$, where $\mathbb{Q}$ is the set of all rational numbers, that is, $\mathbb{N}$ + repeating decimals. The proofs of these relations are not particularly difficult, but they are obviously outside the scope of this chapter; they can be found in any textbook on set theory. For reference, Georg Cantor identi-

fied $|\mathbb{N}|$, which he symbolized $\aleph_0$, as the smallest transfinite cardinal. He believed, but was never able to prove, that $2^{\aleph_0} = |\mathbb{R}| = \aleph_1$, that is, that the cardinality of the set of all real numbers (also known as the continuum) was the next smallest transfinite cardinal. This proposition, known as the General Continuum Hypothesis, was shown in 1963 by Paul Cohen to be independent of (neither contradicting nor required by) the axioms of "standard" Zermelo-Fraenkel (ZF) set theory. Cohen used in his demonstration a technique called "forcing," which Badiou later adopts as a model of situational change from a position of indiscernibility.

16. Consider, for example, the sets $\mathbb{N}$ (the natural numbers) and $\mathbb{Q}$ (the rational numbers). Although they have the same cardinality, that is, the same number of members (namely, $\aleph_0$), there are clearly members of $\mathbb{Q}$ that are not members of $\mathbb{N}$ (there are infinitely many of them: all fractional numbers). Such are the curious properties of infinite sets.

17. Technically there are four types of entity in Badiou's schema: normal, excrescent, singular, and void. The last is treated somewhat separately from the others as that which is common to them all.

18. See *EE* 116–17 and 194ff.

19. In a sign of the difficulty of the concept of singularity, Hallward—who usually writes with impressive clarity and technical rigor—describes a singularity in general as "something or someone strangely out of place, . . . a violation of the way things should be" (*B* 99).

20. Whether or not Badiou's theory can provide an adequate account of relationality is an ongoing debate in the secondary literature and is the specific point of Hallward's sharpest criticism of set theory as ontology; see his *Badiou* 271–315 and *Think Again* 12–20.

21. *EE* 195. An evental site differs from a singularity, if at all, only in the requirement that all of its elements (rather than simply one or more of them) be absent from the situation, though I am not convinced that this is a meaningful distinction. *Evental* translates the French *événementiel* (from *événement*, event). This form is the standard usage in translations of Badiou and seems preferable to *eventful*, which strays misleadingly from the meaning of the noun *event*.

22. Here and throughout, I have focused on the identification of new elements of a situation as one of expansion or pluralization, but the process can of course work in the opposite direction, unifying elements that were previously presented as distinct—for example, when two sets of symptoms are shown to derive from the same underlying disorder. *Decision* or *declaration* are reasonable synonyms for *identification* here.

23. Cf. Jech 70–71.

24. Hence the title *Being and Event*, which, like Heidegger's and Sartre's before it, names first that which *is* and then that which *is other than* being.

25. Although Badiou himself does not specify it, the *situation* of which this site is a member is presumably to be understood as the broader context of late Enlightenment Europe, but of course it is difficult to say with certainty in this—or perhaps in any—case, exactly where the limits of any sufficiently broad situation lie. This fact raises serious questions about the nature of situations and their regimes of denumeration.

26. This example emphasizes an essential similarity between excrescence, as that which might be—but is not (yet)—treated as one, and singularity, which involves the disunification of that which was unified. It seems perfectly plausible to treat them as two as-

pects of the same process, namely, the alteration of the regime of unification, though Badiou is perhaps less willing to do so. To return to the example of homosexuality as excrescence raised earlier, it is reasonable to claim that its recognition, too, represents an event, and it would be hard to deny that a world that includes homosexuals as such is qualitatively different from one the counts instead the *ἐραστής* [lover] and *ἐρόμενος* [beloved] of ancient Greece. But it is the alteration of the situation itself through the identification of an excrescence, rather than the simple existence of that excrescence, that makes possible their pseudo-equivalence. In a related point, Giorgio Agamben asserts in *Homo Sacer* that Badiou identifies events (through the "exception") with excrescence (24–25). This is a mistake, at least insofar as Badiou refuses to collapse excrescence and singularity, as is clear in the definition of the matheme of the event; an evental site is always an element of its situation and therefore cannot be excrescent.

27. See *Genealogy of Morals* §1.13

28. Incidentally, this appears to be the source of Badiou's unfortunate use (and dismissal) of the term *constructivism*, which he equates largely with ordinary language philosophy and mathematical intuitionism, the latter being closely associated with *constructibilism*, the proposition in the philosophy of mathematics that $V = L$, that is, that the (set-theoretical) universe consists only of those sets that can be built up from their proper subsets (see Mount §1.2 and Jech 99–108). His objection is that such procedures cannot account for change because they are concerned merely with reshuffling the existing objects of knowledge rather than with creating new procedures of truth (*EE* 317–25). Whatever the problems of either intuitionism or ordinary language philosophy, this is hardly an accurate image or critique of constructivism in the sense given to it by, for instance, Bruno Latour, Foucault, or Richard Rorty. In fact, I take Badiou's own account of truth, event, and situation to be largely compatible with constructivism and am working here to demonstrate this compatibility.

29. This temporal separation of occurrence and identification in Badiou differs from Deleuze, for example. In seeking to find in each event an aspect of the unchanging Event, Deleuze creates a situation in which events are always both presented (as functions) and represented (as concepts or geometries)—and therefore are always already normalizable within their own situation. Which is to say, they are not events at all. See in particular Deleuze's claim in *The Logic of Sense* that there must exist "a mobile and precise point in which all events gather together in one" (153) and his analysis of throws of the dice in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* and *What Is Philosophy?*

There is a large body of work in French and in English concerning the relationship between Badiou and Deleuze. Particularly useful are Badiou's own *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* and Juliette Simont's article "Critique de la représentation et ontologie chez Deleuze et Badiou—Autour du 'virtuel.'" For more on the specific problem of the singularity or multiplicity of events as conceived by the two, see Bruno Besana's "Un seul ou plusieurs événements?" and my "Events as Dual and Narrative Entities in Deleuze and Badiou."

30. Badiou uses the term *name of the event* rather than *evental statement* in *L'Etre et l'événement* but has abandoned it in his more recent work, apparently to avoid the mistaken impression that this name belongs to the event's leader or discoverer. His analysis in this case is similar in spirit to Latour's account of the discovery or invention of microbes in *The Pasteurization of France*, an event that is named for Pasteur but does not belong to him.

31. Consider Robbe-Grillet's formulation of the literary event in his early essay "A Future for the Novel" (1956): "The risk of such rebuffs is merely increased if one dares to claim that this new literature is not only possible in the future, but is already being written, and that it will represent—in its fulfillment—a revolution more complete than those which in the past produced such movements as romanticism or naturalism" (*For a New Novel* 18).

32. See also Badiou's brief discussion of Newtonian astronomy at *EE* 440–41.

33. See note 15. More information on the mathematical details of forcing can be found in Cohen's extremely technical *Set Theory and the Continuum Hypothesis* and in chapter 3 of Jech. Badiou's own treatment is in meditation 36 of *EE*; see also Hallward's summary in *B* 135–39 and his more detailed treatment at 340–48.

34. This applies to those terms present in both situations, the meanings of which have changed in the new one, as well as to those wholly absent from the old one.

Chapter 4: The Encyclopedia as Object and Metaphor

1. Descombes 54, emphasis in original. The quotation from Derrida is found at *Grammatology* 18.

2. Examples include Cato's *Praecepta ad filium*, Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, and Cassiodorus's *Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum*. On the history of encyclopedias, see Collison.

3. Concerning method, see "General Introduction; or, A Preliminary Treatise on Method" in Coleridge's *Works* 11: 629–87 and compare the closely related essays in *The Friend* 448–524, which appeared in the same year (1818). Coleridge was hired to direct the production of the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* in 1817, but he later left the project in a dispute with the publishers; the *Metropolitana* was completed, without Coleridge's further participation, in twenty-eight volumes in 1845. Cf. Coleridge, *Works* 11: 625–28, and Collison 229–37.

4. Though it should be noted that the fourth division of the work—eight of the projected twenty-four volumes—was to be given over to topics "Alphabetical, Miscellaneous, and Supplementary." Some things, it appears, could not be systematized. For the whole of Coleridge's "Plan," see *Works* 11: 686–87.

5. An analogy here is the periodic table of the elements, which had for many years (and in a sense still has) "holes" that predicted the properties of as-yet undiscovered elements and their relationship to "nearby" elements.

6. For a recent consideration of the formative tension between systematization and accumulation, see Bruno Bosteels's survey of the "nonplace" as a locus of poststructuralist thought in France, "Nonplaces: An Anecdoted Topography of Contemporary French Theory." Bosteels's article focuses in particular on Foucault's use of encyclopedism in the preface to *The Order of Things*, which is based in turn on Borges's "Chinese encyclopedia," both texts being frequently cited in contemporary work on the encyclopedic form.

7. As Kuhn remarked in the 1969 postscript to the second edition of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the use of the term *paradigm* in his original text was not always entirely consistent (see especially *Structure* 181–91). As he often suggested in the book and emphasized at length in the postscript, however, one confusion that should be avoided is the strict equation of *paradigm* with *theory* or *rule*. To formulate, revise, and overthrow theo-

ries is a part of the normal scientific project, whereas to cast off one paradigm in favor of another is necessarily revolutionary. Theories are explanations for experimental observations, both of which, theory and experiment, are enabled by their reference to or invocation of paradigmatically established results, which may themselves be primarily theoretical or primarily experimental.

8. A relevant analogy would be that of a game of chess or of soccer, in which the given rules determine the kinds of moves available to the players but do not dictate any particular outcome. Likewise, the unsatisfactory results of a game may indicate problems with the rules as formulated, but they cannot change those rules, a process that occurs only outside the game itself.

9. Measuring the precession of the perihelion of Mercury, for example, or, to shift analogies, finding new ways to put a ball into a net.

10. Crisis-inducing anomalies in the physical sciences have included the aforementioned precession of Mercury's perihelion, the photoelectric effect, and black body radiation (all crises in Newtonian mechanics), and the weight gain of roasted metals (phlogiston chemistry). A noncrisis-inducing anomaly was Pons and Fleishmann's later discredited cold fusion claim of 1989, which appeared to violate the received laws of physics but can now be adequately explained by conventional theories.

11. The meaning of "satisfactory" will of course depend largely on the scale of the perceived crisis, which is an inverse measure of the old paradigm's continued influence.

12. Compare Northrop Frye's assertion that "all commentary is allegorical interpretation" (*Anatomy* 89), a claim the limitations of which Fredric Jameson addresses in his "From Metaphor to Allegory." See also Hilary Clark's "Encyclopedic Discourse," to which I return below.

13. Even in the central cases, unanimity was (and remains) difficult to achieve; Franco Moretti's thesis, examined below, holds that the term *modernism* as conventionally applied joins together objects that ought to be split into two or more distinct classes. From the list given here, Joyce, Proust, Mann, Musil, and Faulkner fall into a group associated with the longer history of the epic; Woolf, Conrad, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald (along with Kafka) have alternate filiations. See, most concisely, the introduction to *Modern Epic*. And that's to say nothing of the last decade or so's proliferation of global modernisms, though they are an altogether different phenomenon, historically speaking.

14. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §§65–75, and *The Blue and Brown Books* 17–18.

15. For representative studies, see Brown, Donato, and Hahn (on the *Encyclopédie*); Hurst (on medieval romance in France); Cocozzella (on Ausiàs March); Wong (on Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*); Ferris (on Kant, Hegel, and the Jena Romantics); and Bersani (on Flaubert).

16. Frye 247. For the sake of completeness, the five modes identified in *Anatomy of Criticism* are myth, romance, high mimesis, low mimesis, and irony, reflecting the (decreasing) relative "capacity for action" of the hero. See *Anatomy*, essay one, especially pages 33–34.

17. Mendelson treated *Gravity's Rainbow* at greater length in his "Gravity's Encyclopedia," published in the same year, an essay that contains much of the same material covered in the *MLN* piece. Unfortunately, these two articles represent his only published work on the topic.

18. In support of this point, Mendelson observed that each of the books in question contains at least one character who attempts, with foolish or tragic consequences, to live according to the conventions of a single form. Examples include Don Quixote, of course, as well as Stubb (farce) and Gerty McDowell (novel).

19. Moretti, *Modern Epic* 6, emphasis in original. Moretti makes this claim about the "problem-solving" role of literature only briefly in the introduction to his book and never returns to it explicitly, but he clearly intends it to be a fully generalizable statement of the arts' post-facto, reactive relationship to "great social changes" (6) and it motivates the remainder of his evolutionary theory of literary historiography.

20. It should be noted that Moretti considers his use of *epic* to be largely equivalent to Mendelson's *encyclopedia*; he prefers the former term to the latter "because of its narrative connotations" (4). For reasons that will become clear below, we should also bear in mind that Moretti's focus on *refunctionalization* (another equivalent term, drawn from biology proper, would be *exaptation*) is a matter of emphasis in his study, rather than an argument for its relative significance in comparison to *variational* (*mutational*) novelty.

21. One of Moretti's consistent targets is what he calls a "Hegelian" understanding of *Zeitgeist* as total and singular, "recurring in every picture, every novel, and every symphony" (150). As the exclusion of Mallarmé, Woolf, and Kafka makes clear, Moretti is less interested in accounting for traditional monolithic modernism as such than in providing an alternative model of socio-aesthetic development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

22. Moretti observes that perhaps the defining feature of the true epic is that material may be cut from or added to it at will without changing its form.

23. Moretti frequently refers to the transitional literature that is his object as bricolage, emphasizing its "assembled" quality (see, for example, page 120), but we ought not to be misled by this fact into undervaluing new forms and devices relative to redeployed ("refunctionalized") ones, nor forget that the difference between the two is one of degree rather than kind. New forms must both draw on and be received into existing situations, while older forms put to new uses no longer fulfill the same roles they once did. Every innovation thus both repeats what it replaces and differs from it absolutely. This is, of course, another way of stating the undecidable relationship between the event and its situation.

Chapter 5: Allegory, Encyclopedism, and Postwar America

1. Substantially more detailed plot summaries are available in Moore's *Reader's Guide* 29–48 and Johnston 42–106.

2. A critique of *The Recognitions*' early critical reception is provided in Jack Green's entertainingly polemical *Fire the Bastards!* Originally published in 1962, it responds point by point to the perceived shortcomings of each review that had appeared to that date.

3. Note that the entries for periods in which edited collections appeared have been adjusted to exclude previously published essays.

4. For Bruno Latour's theory of social networks and the role of nonhuman agents within them, see *The Pasteurization of France*, especially part 2, "Irreductions," and *Science in Action*. Latour borrows the term *actant* from A. J. Greimas, though he uses it to less narrative-driven ends; for Greimas's original sense, see his *Structural Semantics*.

5. Fredric Jameson makes a similar point in "From Metaphor to Allegory." For a more

complete treatment of allegory and periodization in theoretical terms that inform the present argument, see my "Toward a Benjaminian Theory of Dialectical Allegory."

6. See McElroy's "Gaddis Dialogue Questioned."

7. The partygoers' evaluations of Max's *L'âme d'un chantier* (§I.5, 169–201) show, if not an identical disinterest in the authenticity of the work's expression, a confusion concerning its meaning that indicates the absence of any clear experience conveyed by it. The work is clearly proper to Max; it is authentically his (and it is praised accordingly, for the same reason Otto's play in panned), but what he possesses through it is entirely uncertain.

8. For Moore's treatment of alchemy, see *Reader's Guide* 10–21. Other discussions of Gaddis's use of alchemy can be found in Comnes (chapter 2) and in Leverence (41–45).

9. §I.7, pages 222–60, especially 243–47. This section is Valentine's first direct appearance in the novel, marking him from the outset as a potential conduit or intermediary between Wyatt's and Brown's positions.

10. Gaddis frequently uses ellipses in his text. My own elisions are indicated by ellipsis marks enclosed in square brackets; all others belong to Gaddis's original.

11. Recall that Wyatt had only moments earlier rejected incredulously Brown's suggestion that he might produce a forged Fra Angelico on the ground that he, unlike Angelico, cannot work "down on his knees" with "his eyes full of tears when he painted Christ on the Cross" (242), that is, he cannot repeat or share the earlier painter's particular relationship to or knowledge of religious experience.

12. Synecdochical because he is an integral part of the larger system; metonymic because his role as an exploiter of market defects—a con man, essentially—is habitually associated with the market as a whole.

13. Although of course it is possible—even likely—that the emerging alternative will appear, within the old situation, as a mark of that situation's decline, the old rules and standards no longer functioning effectively to prevent their transgression by the new.

14. "Modern" in this case is linked particularly to the abstract expressionism of the New York school, which *The Recognitions* presents consistently as a metonym of late modernism.

15. Rilke's poem begins, in Leishman's translation as quoted by Gaddis:

> Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic
> orders? And even if one of them suddenly
> pressed me against his heart, I should fade in the strength of his
> stronger existence. For Beauty's nothing
> but beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear,
> and why we adore it so is because it serenely
> disdains to destroy us. Each single angel . . .

The experience Rilke's poem imagines is paradigmatically sublime in its conflation of power, beauty, and terror.

16. The analogous point in *Pilgrim's Progress* concerns Christian's attempt to solve the problem of the good Christian life in rigorously Christian terms, unlike, for example, Worldly-Wiseman (who seeks a different good, as do Brown and Esther in *The Recognitions*) or Faithful (who grasps only one aspect of the solution).

17. Regarding Wyatt's paintings as imitations in the derogatory sense, recall his own horror at the realization that his works have altered contemporary reception of the artists and traditions on which they are based. Quoting a review of one of his earlier forgeries, Wyatt tells Brown that it will be impossible to complete any further counterfeits: "It is too late now. 'The finest painting, and perhaps the culminating achievement of the fifteenth-century genius Dierick Bouts.' You see? I have to tell them" (363). The point is that if—as he often claims—his work constituted a legitimate continuation or extension of the earlier period, the changes it introduced into the perception of that period would be natural and unobjectionable rather than a source of calumny and dismay.

18. This lack of specificity has not stopped a number of critics from concluding, with Christopher Knight, that Wyatt finishes by overcoming his "limited" artistic ethic in favor of "transcendent unity" and "redemption . . . beyond the plane of art" (Knight, "Flemish Art" 68). See also Klemtner; also Salemi. Concerning Thoreau, see *Walden* 88–90 (chapter 2). Note in particular that Thoreau saw simplicity and deliberateness as ways to "live deep" and to avoid a life "not truly lived."

19. The exception in Wyatt's case is the portrait of his mother, which, unlike his forgeries, remains always unfinished. This fact supports a link between Wyatt's counterfeits and the ideology he attempts to adopt from the Northern Renaissance, the Camilla painting being his sole work that both precedes and supersedes their model.

20. The novel's titular allusion to the Clementine *Recognitions* (373) is typical in this regard; coupled with Valentine's succinctly misleading summary of the earlier text's plot, it would seem to suggest a potential source or model for the later work, but any mapping between the two collapses into irony or simple nonrelation on closer examination. More generally, this is the primary reason why a reading of the novel that identifies it closely with Wyatt's quest is deeply implausible.

21. In literature, examples beyond Gaddis's novel include the Beats' gasoline-and-Benzedrine-inflected Romanticism, Ellison's return to Thoreau, Nabokov's grapple with American innocence, Beckett's bleak existentialism, and the increasing interpenetration of genre fiction and literary fiction in the postwar period. The last example, as well as the mass appeal of middlebrow literature driven in part by marketing institutions such as the Book-of-the-Month Club (see Radway) indicate the direct links between literary "markets" considered in a Bourdieuian sense as systems of non- and extramonetary valuation and exchange or as evolutionary domains in Moretti's sense, and the larger consumer markets of which literary commodities constitute only a small part.

Chapter 6: Ellison's Impure Manifesto

1. For a summary of the novel's critical reception in the years immediately following its publication, see Robert Butler's contribution to Steven Tracy's volume, as well as the last chapter of Lawrence Jackson's biography of Ellison. Concerning the academic reception of the novel, compare the number of MLA bibliographic citations for the subject "Ralph Ellison," which totaled 851 by mid-2013 (of which 119 appeared in the first two decades after *Invisible Man*'s publication), to the figures for Gaddis cited in the previous chapter (184 total citations, but just 2 that appeared within twenty years of *The Recognitions*' publication). By "intellectual" press, I have in mind journals of the type represented by *Partisan Review*,

Commentary, and *Dissent*, although not exclusively those associated with the New York school or the anti-Communist left.

2. Irving Howe's "Black Boys and Native Sons" is of course the best known of such approaches, though it did not appear in its final form until a decade after *Invisible Man* was published. See also Howe's early review of the novel for *The Nation*, Abner Berry's for the *Daily Worker*, and, more recently, Houston Baker's polemical essay "Failed Prophet and Falling Stock." Not every comparison to Wright's work judged Ellison the lesser of the two writers, of course, but those concerned explicitly with the value of literature as social intervention did so at a rate much higher than most others. Ellison's responses to Howe are collected as "The World and the Jug" in *Shadow and Act*.

3. Concerning Ellison's Americanism outside the pages of *Invisible Man*, see his National Book Award acceptance address ("Brave Words for a Startling Occasion"), the review essay "Richard Wright's Blues," and the 1955 *Paris Review* interview "The Art of Fiction," all collected in *Shadow and Act*.

4. Useful considerations of the American political situation as it related to literary movements in the thirties, forties, and fifties include Robert Genter's and Jonathan Arac's articles on Ellison's debt to Kenneth Burke, as well as the longer study of Ellison by Alan Nadel and the essays collected by Kimberly Bentson. See also the more broadly focused work of Howard Brick, Tyrus Miller, Alan Wald, and Jerry Gafio Watts.

5. In addition to Ellison's own declarations concerning his rejection of naturalism, see the convenient overviews by Charles Davis and Robert Genter and Nadel's book on Ellison's relationship to the American canon, especially chapters 1 and 2.

6. *Enlightenment* is a term loaded even more heavily than usual in this context, given the narrator's race, the frame narrative's symbolic account of the Invisible Man's "battle" with Monopolated Light and Power, and the long-standing critical dispute concerning the political and ethical value of his retreat underground. More on this point follows directly below.

7. *Regressive* or *conservative* are used in this case as characterizations of the narrator's trajectory over the course of the novel, not as adjectives describing the reading itself.

8. Incidentally, critical consideration of the Invisible Man's more-or-less formal speeches is curiously thin, particularly in comparison to either the framing prologue-epilogue pair (an explicit address to the reader) or the Trueblood episode (a rhetorical masterpiece in which the narrator participates only as a spectator). This is especially true of the eviction episode taken up below, which to my knowledge has never been the object of a published close reading.

9. A fourth oration—the novel's first, excepting the address to the reader in the prologue—is the narrator's valedictory speech following the battle royal. But this differs from the others in a number of important respects: it is an instance of humiliation for the speaker; the views it contains (concerning the value of humility and acceptance) are plainly contradicted by both the circumstances surrounding its delivery and by later developments in the novel; it is delivered to an entirely hostile audience whom it aims to placate rather than arouse to action; it is antipolitical rather than politically exhortatory; it is prepared rather than developed spontaneously; etc. For this reason it should be seen not as a prototype of the later speeches but as an elaboration of the Invisible Man's initial ideological configuration.

10. The full scene is *Invisible Man* 267–84; the speech itself is 275–80.

11. The previous disillusionments are thus revealed to be similarly nonevental, since they too do not provide any new object of fidelity.

Chapter 7: Integration and Disorder in *The Golden Notebook*

1. To avoid confusion with the novel as a whole (*The Golden Notebook*), the "golden notebook" refers only to the section of the novel that records the final phase of Anna's illness and her purported recovery. Lessing's own usage, when she discussed the book in interviews (but not within the novel itself), sometimes differed.

2. This explains the relevance of the closing separation as well; Anna must leave Molly if she is to establish herself as fully individual.

3. Although what exactly "true" means in this context is ambiguous. Anna seems to have in mind the minimal condition that the events and sentiments recounted in the novel actually occurred, whether to her or to others she knew, but this assertion is dubious in light of the material contained in the black notebook, which conflicts with elements of the (admittedly parodic) summary of *Frontiers of War* that is the only description of its content in *The Golden Notebook*. More suggestive would then be the claim that *Frontiers*' truth consists in the accuracy of its treatment of its subject matter (race and politics in Africa during World War II, sexuality and jealousy, etc.), but it is difficult to reconcile this claim with Anna's condemnation of it as the product of a "lying nostalgia."

4. For the relationship between Anna's blockage and her inability to feel, see the early sections of the blue notebook, especially pages 217–24.

5. See John L. Carey, "Art and Reality in *The Golden Notebook*," for an overview and evaluation of critical responses to the autobiographical aspects of Lessing's novel.

6. The presence of this synecdochical everyman is, moreover, one of the reasons encyclopedism is frequently linked to allegory.

7. Recall that Mendelson's original argument held that encyclopedic narrative is linked to the unfolding of national histories and that the emergence of an encyclopedic text (or author, with Shakespeare in the English role) must correspond to a singular break in national development.

8. For an argument in favor of reading Saul as one of "several Annas," see Joseph Hynes's "The Construction of *The Golden Notebook*."

9. See Bulkin. Rich's remark refers to Lessing and *The Golden Notebook* as a whole rather than to Anna specifically, but the point is the same.

10. Ella and Paul being, of course, the thinly fictionalized (or better, metafictionalized) yellow-notebook versions of Anna and Saul. Anna writes of Ella, without apparent irony: "When she loved a man again, she would return to normal: a woman, that is, whose sexuality would ebb and flow in response to his. A woman's sexuality is, so to speak, contained by a man, if he is a real man" (462).

11. This is neither the only nor the most egregious instance of such conscious heteronormativity. Compare Anna's evaluation of her boarder Ivor and his partner, Ronnie, whose presence in her home she fears will damage her daughter, Janet, because they are not "real" or "normal" men and because their relationship "mocks 'normal' love." Anna questions her judgment in allowing them to stay, asking herself: "Why do I assume that all this

won't touch Janet? Why do I take it for granted that children can't be corrupted? What it amounts to is, I'm certain my own influence, the healthy female influence, is strong enough to outweigh theirs. But why should I?" And she concludes by characterizing Ronnie as resembling "a well-brought-up young girl, almost lispingly correct. Very *jeune fille*" (366–68).

12. *EE* 436, emphasis in original. Feltham's translation of this passage is potentially misleading, rendering *qui* as "who" rather than "which" in the first clause set off by commas, thus suggesting a mistakenly individualized biological reading of the subject. The original passage reads: "Les noms qu'utilise un sujet, qui supporte la configuration locale d'une vérité générique, *n'ont en général pas de référent dans la situation*. Ils ne redoublent donc pas le langage établi. Mais alors, à quoi servent-ils? Ce sont les mots qui désignent bien des termes, mais des termes qui 'auront été' présentés dans une nouvelle situation, celle qui résulte de l'adjonction à la situation d'une vérité (indiscernable) de cette situation."

13. As noted in passing in chapter 3, the use of names in this context is closely analogous to Latour's treatment in *The Pasteurization of France* of "Pasteur" as the discoverer of microbes. Just as there is a "historical" Pasteur associated with that discovery (or invention) but who is nevertheless equivalent to neither the discovery itself nor the figure "Pasteur" that is the subject of historical narratives about the discovery, so too there is a "historical" Lenin or Paul (or Cantor, Newton, Einstein, Shakespeare, Joyce, French revolutionary peasantry, etc.), none of which is equal to the revolution that we often identify with his or its name. Cf. chapter 3, note 30.

14. The Invisible Man spends most of Ellison's novel building toward a moment of possibility that he is unable to embrace, which failure marks the novel's failure on the same score. Gaddis's case is in a sense inverse; despite Wyatt's consistently retrograde aesthetics, the novel itself develops a comprehensively forward-looking allegory of cultural production under late modernism, but it abandons both this allegory and Wyatt's place in it in the epilogue, leaving the more adventurous formal properties, which it maintains to the end, in an ambiguous state over against the allegorical content.

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